

Tagalog Bestsellers and the History of the Book in the Philippines

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by

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is a study on the history of the book in the Philippines with a focus on literary publishing and Filipino literary bestsellers of the twentieth century. It begins with a survey on the publishing of books in the Philippines from 1593 when the first book was printed in the country to 2003 when the first nationwide study on reading attitudes and preferences was conducted. The survey pays special attention to literary forms and texts that have played a significant role in the development of Philippine culture and history. It is followed by an examination of literary publishing in the Philippines, in which the local bestselling literary forms of the twentieth century are identified. These types of literary texts are subsequently taken up in case studies that explore the publishing, manufacturing, distribution, reception, and survival of the bestselling books and their relation to the conditions and circumstances in Philippine culture, society, politics, and economics during their time. The case studies, which are centred on specific publishers who were particularly successful in producing the literary bestsellers, are on Tagalog metrical romances (in *awit* and *corrido* forms) published by Juan Martinez during the 1900s to the 1920s; on Tagalog novels published by Palimbagang Tagumpay (Victory Publishing) under the *Aliwan* (Entertainment) series from 1945 to 1947; on the comic books (*komiks*) series published by the group of companies owned by Ramon Roces from the late 1940s to the mid-1980s; and on Filipino romance novels published by Books for Pleasure and by Precious Pages Corporation from 1985 to 2000. This thesis seeks to introduce the History of the Book to Philippine scholarship, where the discipline is still a largely unexplored if not totally unheard of area of study.

For my father

EDUARDO L. JURILLA, M.D.
(1941-2004)

CONTENTS

Illustrations and tables	6
Acknowledgements	8
Introduction	9
1. A survey of Philippine book history (1593-2003)	31
2. In search of bestsellers Twentieth-century literary publishing in the Philippines	99
3. A new demand for old texts Philippine metrical romances in the early twentieth century	131
4. Entertainment after the war <i>Aliwan</i> (1945-1947) and the Tagalog novel	172
5. A serious business Philippine comic book publishing from the late 1940s to the mid-1980s	209
6. Love in the time of turmoil Filipino romance novels of the late twentieth century	262
Conclusion	300
Bibliography	306

ILLUSTRATIONS AND TABLES

FIGURES

1	Title page of the <i>Doctrina Christiana</i> in Spanish and Tagalog	35
2	First page of the <i>Shih-lu</i>	38
3	Title page of the Chinese <i>Doctrina Christiana</i>	41
4	Title page of <i>Ordinationes generales</i>	45
5	Title page of <i>Librong pagaaralan nang manga Tagalog nang uicang Castilla</i>	45
6	Front covers of <i>Florante at Laura</i> textbooks	56
7	Jose Rizal's novels	59
8	Pages from <i>The Baldwin Primer</i>	67
9	The Philippine Contemporary Writers series published by Alberto Benipayo	77
10	Front covers from the Filipino Signatures series	79
11	Publications by Alberto S. Florentino	80
12	Front covers from the Panitikang Pilipino (Philippine Literature) series	94
13	Front cover and title page of the first edition of <i>José Burgos</i>	141
14	Front cover of the second edition of <i>José Burgos</i>	143
15	Back cover of the first part of <i>Belmore y Enriqueta ó La medalla de oro</i>	145
16	Front cover, inside front cover and title page, last page and inside back cover, and back cover of <i>S. Vicente Ferer</i>	147
17	Cover of <i>Juan Labuyo</i> , 2nd printing	149
18	Front cover and title page of <i>Arturo, Lauro at Rosalio</i>	150
19	Front covers of <i>Dalawang mag-amá</i> and <i>Virgen nang Kapayapaan</i>	171
20	Front cover of the sixth issue of <i>Aliwan</i>	175
21	Pages from the 18th issue of <i>Aliwan</i>	176
22	Front cover of the 114th issue of <i>Aliwan</i>	186
23	Front cover of the 143rd issue of <i>Aliwan</i>	191
24	Pages from the 147th issue of <i>Aliwan</i>	193
25	A sampling of <i>komiks</i> pages from the 1950s	213
26	Page from the 'DI-13' series	221
27	Front cover of <i>Pilipino Komiks</i> 60, 17 September 1949	222
28	Front cover and sample pages of 8 January 1955 issue of <i>Tagalog Klasiks</i>	224

29	Front cover of <i>Tagalog Klasiks</i> 30, 26 August 1950	226
30	Front cover of <i>Espesyal Komiks</i> 103, 17 September 1956	227
31	Front cover of <i>Pilipino Komiks</i> 67, 24 December 1949	228
32	Front covers of <i>Pilipino Komiks</i> featuring Darna	234
33	Page from a series in <i>Aliwan Komiks</i> 253, 26 June 1972	258
34	Cover of <i>Midnight Phantom</i> by Martha Cecilia	263
35	A sampling of front covers of Filipino romance novels	265
36	Front cover of <i>Sa Iyo Ang Langit, Sa Akin Ang Lupa</i> by Maggie Salvador	274
37	Front covers of two titles of Books for Pleasure	293

TABLES

1	Book production in the Philippines from the 1960s to the 1990s	83
2	Book production in the Philippines 1996-2003	96
3	Profile of comic book readers in the Greater Manila and Cebu Areas	247

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INTRODUCTION

The History of the Book seems a baffling thing for most people. Book historians perhaps share the experience of being asked the same questions by different persons about their area of study: History of the Book? What book? What is History of the Book? What do you do in the History of the Book? The queries could well stem from the label 'the history of the book', an elegant and imposing term but one that is also confusing and misleading, particularly for non-academics. It suggests a grand all-encompassing sweep of the human experience ('history') while maintaining a seemingly incompatible specificity in focus ('the book') maybe even a degree of triviality if one considers books as rather common or ordinary objects. For the academics involved in the study of books, the label apparently has not entirely sat well with them either. To begin with, as Simon Eliot admits, 'history of the book' is 'something of a misnomer' since the discipline does not 'restrict itself to the study of books alone' but actually pays special attention to any kind of text 'whether it be a book, pamphlet, newspaper, magazine, handbill, broadsheet, printed form or raffle-ticket'.¹ Nicolas Barker remarks that there is something clumsy about the phrase 'the

This introduction is adapted in part from the author's essay 'What Book? An Introduction to the History of the Book and Prospects for Philippine Studies', which was published in the journal *Philippine Studies* in 2003.

¹ 'History of the Book', in *A Handbook to Literary Research*, ed. by Simon Eliot and W. R. Owens (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 49-62 (p. 49).

book', for the abstraction that comes naturally to the French '*le livre*' or the German '*Buchwesen*' does not translate into English.² Robert Darnton, who refers to the discipline as 'history of books', suggests that it 'might even be called the social and cultural history of communication in print, if that were not so much of a mouthful'.³ Some have called it simply 'book history' or 'the study of the book'. Still, there are other labels—'the new literary history', 'the new bibliography', 'the sociology of texts'—for areas of study with activities and concerns curiously similar to that of the History of the Book.

The term originates from *l'histoire du livre*, taken from Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin's groundbreaking text *L'Apparition du livre*, published in Paris in 1958. Febvre was one of the primary figures behind the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* (founded in 1929) and the French school that promoted a new approach to the study of history with its use of social science methods. *L'Apparition du livre* cast a new and bright light on books and consequently on the study of the book. It examined 'the influence and practical significance of the printed book [primarily in Western Europe] during the first 300 years of its existence'.⁴ Febvre and Martin determined the book as not only 'a triumph of technical ingenuity' but also 'one of the most potent agents at the disposal of western civilisation in bringing together the scattered ideas of representative thinkers'.⁵ *L'Apparition du livre* was translated into English as *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450-1800* by David Gerard in 1976.

² 'Reflections on the History of the Book', *The Book Collector*, 39 (1990), 9-26 (p. 10).

³ 'What is the History of Books?', repr. from *Daedalus* (1982), 65-38 in *The Book History Reader*, ed. by David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 9-29 (p. 9).

⁴ Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450-1800*, trans. by David Gerard (London: Verso, 1976; repr. 1998), p. 11.

⁵ p. 11.

In 1979, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* by the American historian Elizabeth L. Eisenstein appeared. In this monumental two-volume work, Eisenstein defined printing as instrumental in the development of European culture and civilisation, declaring that the shift from script to print culture 'altered the way Western Christians viewed their sacred book and the natural world'.⁶ The printing press, according to Eisenstein, 'laid the basics' for the Renaissance and the Reformation and for modern science. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* has become one of the basic texts in the History of the Book and, as one of its recent critics notes, 'still probably the most influential anglophonic interpretation of the cultural effects of printing'.⁷

While the History of the Book traces its origins to the field of history, to the branch of social history in particular, it is just as rooted in literary studies, growing out of the paradigm shifts in textual criticism and bibliography. In 1983, Jerome J. McGann's *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* came out amidst disputes on editorial theory and practice. McGann took issue with the traditional rule of authorial intention governing the choice of copy-text for editing by maintaining that 'literary works are fundamentally social rather than personal or psychological products'.⁸ He argued that literary authority is 'a social nexus, not a personal possession' thus the 'fully authoritative text is ... always one which has been socially produced'.⁹ McGann called on textual critics to re-imagine their discipline and to take on the task of

⁶ *The Printing Press as An Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), II, p. 703. An abridged and illustrated version of Eisenstein's work was published as *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* in 1983.

⁷ Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1998), p. 10.

⁸ (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1983; repr. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1992), pp. 43-4.

⁹ pp. 48, 75.

considering 'the history of the text in relation to the related histories of its production, reproduction, and reception'.¹⁰

Donald F. McKenzie raised a similar appeal to bibliographers in a series of lectures delivered at the British Library in 1985 (published as *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* in 1986). McKenzie challenged the traditional definition of bibliography and role of bibliographers. This role, as defined by Sir Walter Greg in 1932, stood as such: 'what the bibliographer is concerned with is pieces of paper or parchment covered with certain written or printed signs. With these signs he is concerned merely as arbitrary marks; their meaning is no business of his'.¹¹ Finding Greg's statement 'no longer adequate as a definition of what bibliography is and does', McKenzie proposed that bibliography be reconsidered as 'the discipline that studies texts as recorded forms, and the processes of their transmission, including their production and reception'—or 'bibliography as the study of the sociology of texts'.¹² This new bibliography, according to McKenzie's definition,

accounts for non-books texts, their physical forms, textual versions, technical transmission, institutional control, their perceived meanings, and social effects. It accounts for a history of the book and, indeed, of all printed forms including all textual ephemera as a record of cultural change, whether in mass civilization or minority culture.¹³

What emerged from developments in social history, textual criticism, and bibliography, from the products of French and Anglo-American scholarship, was the *History of the Book*. The term has held as a convenient label or, as Peter Davison

¹⁰ p. 122.

¹¹ Quoted in D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (London: British Library, 1986; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 9.

¹² pp. 10-3

¹³ pp. 12-3.

describes it, 'a useful summary' for a discipline of such broad scope.¹⁴ The History of the Book is interested in the book as a physical object, in the materials and processes used in the manufacture of texts. For books in codex form, these involve paper and binding; inscription and illumination in manuscripts; casting, setting, and inking of type in printed texts; formatting and designing of books; presses and other printing devices. But the History of the Book is just as concerned with the multiplication, distribution, and reception of texts as it is in their production. It studies relationships among authors, publishers, booksellers, librarians, and readers as well as their histories, functions, and systems of operation. The History of the Book maintains that the book in itself has a story to tell, that the book speaks volumes: as a physical object, it reveals technological, artistic, and economic conditions of the particular period when it came into being; as a text, it reflects the intellectual, cultural, and social currents of its age.

With all it encompasses, the History of the Book is a massive subject. In 1982, seeing the new field as 'so overcrowded with ancillary disciplines that one can no longer see its general contours', Darnton sought to establish some order by proposing a model for study. In the essay 'What is the History of Books?', he presented the 'Communications Circuit', which traces the life cycle of the book through author, publisher, printer, shipper, bookseller, and reader. The circuit, as Darnton put it, 'runs full cycle':

It transmits messages, transforming them en route, as they pass from thought to writing to printed characters and back to thought again. Book history concerns each phase of this process and the process as a whole, in all its

¹⁴ 'Introduction' in *The Book Encompassed: Studies in Twentieth-Century Bibliography*, ed. by Peter Davison (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies; New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 1998), pp. 1-11 (p. 5).

variations over space and time and in all relations with other systems,
economic, social, political, and cultural, in the surrounding environments.¹⁵

In 1986, Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker offered a revision of Darnton's theoretical framework in 'A New Model for the Study of the Book'. Declaring that it is the material object that is central in the communications circuit, Adams and Barker shifted the focus from people involved in the book to the book itself. The new model revised Darnton's life cycle of the book into 'five events in the life of a book – publishing, manufacturing, distribution, reception, and survival – whose sequence constitutes a system of communication and can in turn precipitate other cycles'. Four 'zones of influence' affect these events: 'intellectual influences; political, legal, and religious influences; commercial pressures; and social behaviour and taste'.¹⁶ Both Darnton's and Adams and Barker's models have served as useful maps for book historians in exploring their vast territory.

As the History of the Book was emerging in the early 1980s, Darnton hailed the rapidly growing subject as 'likely to win a place alongside fields like the history of science and the history of art in the canon of scholarly disciplines' and noted that it was 'one of the few sectors in the human sciences where there is a mood of expansion and a flurry of fresh ideas'.¹⁷ And, indeed, the discipline has now come into prominence, bringing together all sorts of bookish individuals—historians, bibliographers, literary critics, sociologists, librarians, publishers, book collectors, readers—and establishing its own professional organisations and research centres; conference, seminar, and lecture circuits; and degree courses and programmes. There

¹⁵ pp. 10-1.

¹⁶ Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker, 'A New Model for the Study of the Book', in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society*, ed. by Nicolas Barker (London: British Library; New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2001), pp. 5-43 (p. 15).

¹⁷ p. 9.

are centres for the book and national book research projects in England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, France, the Netherlands, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Book studies programmes have long existed at four German universities (Mainz, Münster, Munich, and Erlangen) and at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. New postgraduate programmes have been established more recently at the Universities of London, Toronto, Wisconsin, South Carolina and at Drew University, among others. There is a steadily growing body of publications on book history, from academic monographs to textbooks. Notable among the latter are the recent volumes prepared by David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery: *The Book History Reader* (2002), a selection of the basic texts from the big names of the discipline, and *An Introduction to Book History* (2005), a useful guide for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Today, the excitement about the novelty of the History of the Book may have waned, but the mood of expansion and flurry of fresh ideas have not. There are resounding calls for cooperative scholarship, for further studies on all kinds of texts in all historical and contemporary forms, for new attention to areas and details previously ignored or taken for granted. There may be unresolved issues and differences among those involved in the study of books, but these seem less important than their shared interests and the common drive to fully explore the vast ground mapped out before them.

In the Philippines, the History of the Book has not yet arrived. It is a territory that is still largely unexplored if not totally unheard of in Philippine scholarship. The basic texts on the subject, for instance, have not found their way into the reading lists of university courses; in the first place, they are not even available in local libraries and

bookshops. However, the ground for the study of the book is not fallow, for much valuable work on Philippine printing and publishing has already been done. An early effort is José Toribio Medina's *La imprenta en Manila desde sus orígenes hasta 1810* (The Printing Press in Manila from its Origins until 1810), published in Chile in 1896. Medina complemented his historical account of the printing press in Manila with a copiously annotated list of 420 publications arranged in chronological order. His work was expanded on by Wenceslao Emilio Retana in *La imprenta en Filipinas: Adiciones y observaciones á La Imprenta en Manila de D. J. T. Medina* (The Printing Press in the Philippines: Additions and Observations on *La Imprenta en Manila* of D. J. T. Medina; Madrid, 1897) and by Angél Perez and Cecilio Güemes in *Adiciones y continuación de 'La imprenta en Manila' de D. J. T. Medina [ó] rarezas y curiosidades bibliográficas filipinas de las bibliotecas de esta capital* (Additions and Continuation of 'La Imprenta en Manila' of D. J. T. Medina [or] Philippine Bibliographical Rarities and Curiosities of the Libraries in its Capital; Manila, 1904). Medina subsequently produced his own extension volume, *La imprenta en Manila desde sus orígenes hasta 1810: Adiciones y ampliaciones* (The Printing Press in Manila from its Origins until 1810: Additions and Expansions; Chile, 1904), with a list of 565 bibliographical items.¹⁸ Then, there is Retana's indispensable body of works on Philippine printing history. Among them are *Aparato bibliográfico de la historia general de Filipinas deducido de la colección que posee en Barcelona la Compañía General de Tabacos de dichas islas* (Bibliographical Apparatus on the General History of the Philippines Deduced from the Collection of the Compañía General de Tabacos in Barcelona; Madrid, 1906; reprinted in Manila, 1964), a three-volume catalogue of local and foreign books on the Philippines, consisting of 4623 entries and an

¹⁸ Medina's *La imprenta en Manila* (1896) and its *Adiciones y ampliaciones* (1904) were reprinted together in one volume in 1964 as part of the Reprint Series of José Toribio Medina's Bibliographical Works published by N. Israel in Amsterdam.

introductory essay on Philippine bibliography;¹⁹ *Tablas cronologicas y alfabéticas de imprentas e impresores de Filipinas (1593-1898)* (Chronological and Alphabetical Tables of Printing Presses and Printers of the Philippines (1593-1898); Madrid, 1908), a listing that covers the Spanish colonial period; and *Orígenes de la imprenta en Filipinas* (The Origins of The Printing Press in the Philippines; Madrid, 1911), a historical, bibliographical, and typographical investigation of books printed in the Philippines from 1593 to 1640. Another significant contribution to Philippine printing and publishing history is Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera's *Biblioteca Filipina* (Philippine Library), an annotated list of publications produced in and on the Philippines, based on his personal collection, with 2850 entries. It was published together with the United States Library of Congress's *Bibliography of the Philippine Islands* (Washington, D.C., 1903; reprinted in Manila, 1994). No less important is Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson's *The Philippine Islands Bibliography*, which appeared as volume 53 of their monumental 55-volume work *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898* (Ohio, 1903-1909; reprinted in Mandaluyong, 1973), a compilation of various Spanish documents in English translation on the Spanish conquest of the Philippines, from the early expeditions to the colonial administration. Blair and Robertson's bibliography includes a list of printed books, with a focus on bibliographies, and a descriptive account of key archives and libraries in and outside the Philippines that held Philippine materials. But it is to the listing of manuscripts that their volume is largely devoted. They believed this to be their 'chief contribution' to Philippine bibliography.²⁰ *The Philippine Islands Bibliography* was eventually reprinted as a

¹⁹ The Tabacalera collection, perhaps the best library of rare Philippine books ever assembled, was acquired by the Philippine National Library in 1913. It was the foundation and centrepiece of the library's rare book holdings. A significant part of the collection now no longer exists due to the destruction wrought by World War II.

Bibliography of the Philippine Islands: Printed and Manuscript (New York, 1970), which appeared in Robertson's name only.

On the earliest books printed in the Philippines, Edwin Wolf 2nd's *Doctrina Christiana: The First Book Printed in the Philippines, Manila, 1593* (Washington, D.C., 1947) is a seminal work. It features a bibliographical history of the Spanish-Tagalog book printed by the Dominicans, the *Doctrina Christiana, en lengua española y tagala* (Doctrina Christiana in Spanish and Tagalog), and a facsimile of the text based on the only surviving copy, now part of the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection of the US Library of Congress. Another influential work on rare Philippine books is P. Van Der Loon's essay 'The Manila Incunabula and Early Hokkien Studies' in *Asia Major: A British Journal of Far Eastern Studies* (1966; reprinted in Manila, n.d.), a survey of printing in Manila from 1593 to 1607. Van Der Loon examined six books in his study: *Hsin-k'o seng-shih Kao-mu Hsien chaun Wu-chi t'ien-chu cheng-chiao chen-chuan shih-lu* ('A printed edition of the veritable record of the authentic tradition of the true faith in the Infinite God, by the religious master Kao-mu Hsien'; 1593); *Doctrina Christiana, en lengua española y tagala* (1593); *Doctrina christiana en letra y lengua china* (Doctrina Christiana in Chinese letters and language; c.1605-1607); *Ordinationes generales provinciae Sanctissimi Rosarii Philippinarum* (The General Ordinances of the Philippine Province of the Holy Rosary; 1604); *Memoria de la vida christiana en lengua china* (Memoir of the Christian Life in Chinese; 1606); and *Simbolo de la Fe, en lengua y letra China* (Articles of Faith, in Chinese language and letters; 1607).

A number of important bibliographic projects were undertaken beginning in the 1960s. Among them was the University of the Philippines (UP) Library's *Philippine*

²⁰ In the 'Introduction' to *The Philippine Islands Bibliography*, Blair and Robertson note that the bibliographies that preceded their effort generally concentrated on printed matter. Finding it 'unnecessary to duplicate work that has been efficiently done already', they thus chose to pay special attention to manuscripts. *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898*, 55 vols (Cleveland, Ohio: Arthur H. Clark, 1903-09; repr. Mandaluyong: Cacho Hermanos, 1973), LIII, 9-54 (pp. 9, 11).

Bibliography series, which was launched in 1965. Its first volume listed Philippine materials published in 1963 and 1964. The list was based on the acquisitions of the UP Library; holdings of other libraries, government agencies and offices; catalogues and printed lists of publishers, printers, and book dealers; and materials from the Copyright Office of the Philippine National Library. The bibliography included books, pamphlets, government publications, and first issues of new periodicals. The entries were arranged alphabetically under two sections: publications by commercial and other non-government agencies, and publications by various Philippine government entities. Four other volumes were produced under the *Philippine Bibliography* series: for the years 1965, 1966-1967, 1968-1969, and 1970-1972. The series was an attempt at compiling a national bibliography, but it had 'great inadequacies' and was not 'complete or exhaustive', as the compilers themselves admitted. Not included in the listings, for instance, were primary- and secondary-school textbooks as well as music sheets and what the compilers determined as 'materials of extremely ephemeral nature'.²¹

In 1968, Gabriel A. Bernardo's *Bibliography of Philippine Bibliographies 1593-1961* was published posthumously (in Quezon City). The work covered Philippine bibliographies and important bibliographical lists, catalogues of private and public libraries, sales catalogues, and books and pamphlets containing bibliographical information on the Philippines that were issued during the designated period. It contained 1160 entries, arranged chronologically, some with annotations. It was intended as a companion volume for the *Philippine Retrospective National Bibliography 1523-1699*, which was published in 1974 (Manila).

²¹ 'Preface', *Philippine Bibliography 1963/1964* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Library, 1965), pp. iv-v.

In the 1970s, the National Library began issuing its *Philippine National Bibliography* (*PNB*) series, which appeared as bi-monthly (later quarterly) publications with annual compilations. The series aimed to provide a 'listing of new works published or printed in the Philippines, by Filipino authors, or about the Philippines, including unpublished materials' and to serve as a catalogue of 'copyright entries for duly copyrighted Filipiniana items'.²² The first annual *PNB* volume, published in 1976, covered the year 1974. The entries were arranged alphabetically under the following categories: (1) books, pamphlets, conference, seminar, and workshop papers, etc; (2) periodicals, newspapers, annuals, etc; (3) government publications; (4) theses and dissertations; (5) musical scores; and (6) foreign titles reprinted in the Philippines. Beginning with the 1976 annual, the *PNB* revised its listings: it presented a single list of entries organised according to the Dewey Decimal system. The types of material included in the bibliographies remained the same; however, the listing of theses and dissertations began to be issued in separate volumes beginning in 1986. The *PNB* is an invaluable contribution to Philippine bibliography, but the data on printing and publishing that it provides require careful examination and qualification on the part of scholars. The listing of books, pamphlets, and papers in the 1974 volume, for instance, evidently included everything and anything that the National Library came across: from souvenir programmes to personal résumés and from song lyrics to television scripts aside from trade books and textbooks. Then, each annual volume does not actually list works that were published or printed only during the year of its coverage but includes other recent items that had not been previously listed. Finally, while the *PNB* covers both copyrighted and non-copyrighted materials, its listings cannot be considered as comprehensive or complete due to the fact that not all Filipino

²² 'Preface', *Philippine National Bibliography 1974* (Manila: National Library of the Philippines, 1976), pp. v-vii (p. v).

publishers and writers bother to copyright, register, or deposit their works with the National Library. The *PNB* has maintained its regular publication up to the present.

Many other books, articles, and items relating to printing and publishing history have since been produced. Worth special mention are two recent important efforts: *Impreso: Philippine Imprints 1593-1811* (Manila, 1993) by Regalado Trota Jose and *History of Books and Libraries in the Philippines 1521-1900* (Manila, 1996) by Vicente S. Hernández. Jose's *Impreso* provides an exhaustive list of books printed in the Philippines from 1593 to 1811, with thorough bibliographical information for each entry, including the present location of extant copies. Hernández's *History of Books and Libraries* studies the sources and events pertaining to Philippine library history; it also offers a chronological list of references to the printing of books and the establishment of libraries in the Philippines. The latest work is *A History of Publishing in the Philippines* by Dominador D. Buhain (Manila, 1998). It presents many interesting photographs of Philippine publications but not much of a comprehensive account on Philippine publishing history.

The studies on Philippine printing and publishing so far, from Medina and Retana to Jose and Hernández, are mainly descriptive and bibliographic. They tell the story of the book in the Philippines. What begs to be done is the task of reading into this story—into the physical aspect of the book itself and the developments in its production throughout the years as well as into its role in shaping Philippine culture and history, or to situate history in the book and the book in history. The Philippine experience certainly lends itself to such a reading considering that two particular books played a monumental role in the development of the nation and hold a sacred place in the national consciousness: Jose Rizal's novels *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me

Not, published in Berlin in 1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (The Filibuster; Ghent, 1891), which inspired the Philippine Revolution against Spain in 1896.

The History of the Book is a particularly exciting if not intimidating area for Philippine scholars. The terrain to cover is immense, the journey quite lonely and rough at this point. An enormous amount of basic archival and bibliographical work remains to be done on all aspects of printing and publishing throughout Philippine history. Then, there are seemingly endless questions, not only to answer but more immediately to formulate and to articulate. There is much to uncover about the book in Philippine culture and history, many gaps to fill and links to establish. The topics for study are nearly limitless, and each research project is certainly necessary and potentially groundbreaking in Philippine scholarship. This is the very challenge and one of the many rewards of doing book history on (and in) the Philippines.

The History of the Book has much to offer Philippine Studies. For one, the discipline would serve a very practical purpose: the survival of Philippine texts. Philippine books have an almost ephemeral quality to them due to the elements they are subjected to—wars, fires, floods, earthquakes, the humid tropical climate, termites—not to mention the generally small sizes of print runs and the cheap materials and processes used in manufacture. Involved as it is in the chronicling of printing and publishing, the study of the book would warrant that records of the texts would survive at least if the actual objects do not. Furthermore, the attention given to books by the discipline could well lead to the reprinting of valuable but long-forgotten texts thus securing their survival. Then, the History of the Book would also be useful to introductory courses on research, literature, and communication in both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It offers an excellent opportunity for developing skills in research, using both primary and secondary materials, and in

analysis. Given the massive scope of the discipline, it opens up for students all sorts of topics for their research projects and could lead them to paying closer attention to Philippine literature, Philippine culture, and Philippine history instead of looking outward, as the nation's colonial experience has long had students do. It could also have them producing more interesting and useful works than yet another critical essay on Shakespeare or Hemingway, yet another term paper on (against) contraception or abortion.²³ Ultimately, the *History of the Book* would contribute to the knowledge of Philippine literature, culture, and history by establishing facts, enhancing details, and expanding ideas. It offers the scholar another dimension to Philippine studies, a unique and concrete experience in the engagement with and understanding of the heritage of the Philippines.

This thesis aims to usher in the coming of the *History of the Book* in the Philippines. It is a study on Philippine book history with a focus on literary publishing and Filipino literary bestsellers of the twentieth century. Chapter One provides a historical survey of the publishing of books in the Philippines covering 410 years, from 1593 when the first book was printed in the country to 2003 when the first nationwide study on reading attitudes and preferences was conducted. It pays special attention to literary forms and texts that have played a significant role in the development of Philippine culture and history. Chapter Two offers a closer view of literary publishing in the Philippines with an angle on the issue of bestsellers. It traces the patterns and

²³ The writer-publisher Alberto S. Florentino articulated such a sentiment many years ago. In the bibliography *Midcentury Guide to Philippine Literature in English*, Florentino expressed hope that the work 'may indicate to the student, graduate and undergraduate, that there are ample opportunities for research, study, and analysis of our own literature and our own writers; and that if they contemplate to write reports, term papers and theses, instead of yielding to the temptation to write on world-famous and much-written-about authors (T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Albert Camus), they might divert their attention and efforts to our little-known, but (to us) as important, if not more important, writers', (Manila: Filipiniana Publishers, 1963), p. 8.

trends in the production of literary books during the twentieth century, and proposes a re-viewing of Philippine literary publishing that is not restricted to the perspective of the Filipino elite and not determined according to Western standards, as much of traditional Philippine scholarship has been. The chapter identifies the bestselling literary forms in the Philippines throughout the twentieth century. The succeeding chapters take up these types of literary texts in case studies that examine the publishing, manufacturing, distribution, reception, and survival of the bestselling books and their relation to the conditions and circumstances in Philippine culture, society, politics, and economics during their time. The case studies are centred on specific publishers who were particularly successful in producing the literary bestsellers. Chapter Three is on Tagalog metrical romances (in *awit* and *corrido* forms) published by Juan Martinez during the 1900s to the 1920s; Chapter Four, on Tagalog novels published by Palimbagang Tagumpay (Victory Publishing) under the *Aliwan* (Entertainment) series from 1945 to 1947; Chapter Five, on the comic books (*komiks*) series published by the group of companies owned by Ramon Roces from the late 1940s to the mid-1980s; and Chapter Six, on Filipino romance novels published by Books for Pleasure and by Precious Pages Corporation from 1985 to 2000.

In its examination of literary bestsellers, this study looks at types of texts rather than individual titles in order to chart a wider ground and present a bigger picture of the history of the book in the Philippines. But, as it is impossible to cover all aspects and elements of Philippine book history in a single volume, many details have had to be omitted in this study, some of them quite fascinating and by no means unimportant such as the Qur'an manuscripts made in Mindanao (in the southern Philippines) during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or the slew of essay collections in

English by journalists and newspaper columnists that appeared after the EDSA Revolution of 1986.

Aside from its concentration on literary texts, this study is also limited in terms of language: the twentieth-century books that it pays attention to are works written only in Tagalog (Filipino) and in English. This limitation was determined by the fact that Tagalog and English are the most prominent among the languages and dialects of the Philippines, of which there are more than one hundred. Tagalog, which is native to the people of several provinces in central and south Luzon (including the capital city Manila), is the leading vernacular. It was instituted as the basis of the national language in 1937. Although it was also known as 'Tagalog', the Philippine national language was envisaged as a hybrid of the different local vernaculars with Tagalog as the foundation. During the post-World War II period, objections from legislators of the non-Tagalog regions led to a series of reforms on the national language policy. In 1959, the national language was renamed 'Pilipino'. The name was changed to 'Filipino' by the 1973 Philippine Constitution and retained as such by the revised Constitution of 1986. These reforms, however, were nothing more than cosmetic, as Vicente L. Rafael notes: 'Filipino continues to be based on Tagalog with greater infusions of English and bits of Spanish rather than, as national linguists had proposed as early as 1915, a fusion of all Philippine vernaculars'.²⁴ Today, in the Philippines, the national language is still commonly referred to as 'Tagalog'. For purposes of clarity and readability, this study uses 'Tagalog' instead of 'Pilipino' or 'Filipino' in references to the national language. English, on the other hand, has been an official language of the Philippines since the establishment of the American colonial administration in 1901. Throughout the twentieth century, English was the language

²⁴ 'Taglish, or the Phantom Power of the Lingua Franca', in *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), pp. 162-89 (p. 169).

of government, law, finance, and high culture. It was also the medium of instruction in all schools and universities in the country for the most part of the century. Perhaps more significantly, as far as this study is concerned, English is the primary language used in books published in the Philippines. In the early 1980s, publisher Louie O. Reyes (who was also the president of the publishers group Book Development Association of the Philippines) observed that 90 per cent of locally published books were still written in English.²⁵ For the 1981-1991 period, according to publisher Karina A. Bolasco, the catalogues of the leading trade book publishers reveal that only an average of 6 per cent of their total output is in Filipino (Tagalog); the rest is in English.²⁶

Printing and publishing in the other Philippine languages lie beyond the scope and capacity of this study. But it deserves to be noted at least that there are long and lively histories of production, particularly of periodicals, in vernacular languages such as Cebuano, which leads in prominence after Tagalog, as well as in Hiligaynon, Kapampangan, Iloko, and Bikol. Records on book production, however, are scanty and scattered if not non-existent.²⁷ It seems evident, though, that the number of titles produced during the twentieth century is not all that significant. The *PNB* annuals, despite their inadequacies, provide some sense of the publishing or printing activity in the other vernacular languages. Of the 797 books, pamphlets, and papers listed in *PNB 1974*, only forty titles were written in the other vernacular languages, of which eighteen were in Cebuano, while sixty-two were in Tagalog. *PNB 1994* lists a measly

²⁵ Aida Santos Maranan, 'The Book Industry in Distress', *Diliman Review*, 31 (1983), 38-44 (p. 39).

²⁶ 'Emerging Trends in Philippine Publishing', paper delivered at Booklatan sa Bayan: Roundtable Discussions on Current and Emerging Trends in Book Publishing, Roxas City, 6 November 2002.

²⁷ Data on Cebuano literary titles is available in Resil B. Mojares's *Cebuano Literature: A Survey and Bibliography With Finding List* (Cebu City: University of San Carlos, 1975). Otherwise, the only readily accessible source of book publishing in the other vernacular languages is the *PNB*, which lists only titles that come to the attention of the National Library.

fifteen titles in the vernaculars, seven of which were in Cebuano, compared to the 465 titles in Tagalog out of the total record of 1859 materials.

While this study had many and various sources to work with, the information they offered on the printing, publishing, and trading of books in the Philippines was not inexhaustible nor was it always accessible. The data on twentieth-century publishing in particular are scattered, unorganised, and incomplete or even inaccurate. For most of the century, for instance, basic information such as the exact number of titles published per year cannot be ascertained because either no accounts exist (particularly for the first half of the period) or the various ones that do tend to provide varying figures. This is due to the absence of a systematic monitoring of the book trade. It was only in 1976 when the National Library began issuing its regular national bibliography series; only in 1981 when the International Standard Book Number coding system was adopted in the country; and only in 1995 when a government body (the National Book Development Board) was created to specifically monitor the book trade. The non-compliance of many publishers and writers with the law on copyright registration and deposit, and the inefficient enforcement of such have certainly factored in the availability (or non-availability) of data on twentieth-century Philippine publishing. Incidentally, the current copyright code in the Philippines (Republic Act No. 8293), passed in 1998, grants works protection 'from the moment of their creation'. The law still requires that works be registered and deposited with the National Library, but the penalty for not complying with this provision is a mere fine rather than, say, the loss of copyright altogether. This new copyright law does not seem to bode well for Philippine bibliography. Since the law's passing, no case has been taken to court regarding the non-compliance of a publisher or writer with the provisions on registration and deposit.

For data specific to twentieth-century Philippine literary publishing, some helpful materials exist: 'Taláan ng Mga Nobelang Tagalog' (List of Tagalog Novels), which covers the year 1903-1938, prepared by the Surian ng Wikang Pambansa (Institute of National Language) and published in 1939; *Nobelista 75: Panimulang Talaan ng mga Nobelang Tagalog 1900-1974* (Novelist 75: Preliminary List of Tagalog Novels 1900-1974) by the UP Library (1974); 'Philippine Literature in English 1898-1957: A Bibliographical Survey' by Leopoldo Y. Yabes (1957); and *The Filipino Novel in English: A Critical History* by Majid Bin Nabi Baksh Abdul (1970), which includes a bibliography for the period 1921-1966. While these works are important and useful, like the *PNB*, they provide information that cannot be taken at face value. They each have some degree of inadequacy and inconsistency. Data on twentieth-century literary publishing beyond the coverage of these bibliographies are scattered and not readily accessible.

One other kind of basic information on the twentieth-century Philippine book trade that is difficult to come by is the sales figures of books. Such data hardly appears in the available sources, most probably because Filipino publishers generally tend to keep their accounts to themselves. In the Philippines, a book's performance in the market is usually gauged by how many copies were printed and how many impressions or editions were issued rather than how many copies were actually sold. The measure is not quite logical nor all too accurate, but it is apparently what publishers use or only what they would let the public know. Studies on Philippine publishing, including this one, have thus had to settle for and work with print run sizes and reprinting numbers in their examination of the local book trade.

Publishers' archives would have provided invaluable information for this study if only such collections existed in the Philippines. The concept is still practically

unknown in the country. Filipino publishers in general evidently do not keep or save records, or have had their documents destroyed or lost through time, or protect and withhold their files from outsiders, including inquisitive and persistent scholars. Most of the publishers and publishing firms covered by this study have long been dead or dissolved; their surviving relatives, colleagues, or employees too difficult to reach. Some of the existing publishers were not cooperative when approached for information. But a few were most obliging and provided extremely useful facts, figures, and insights.

This study made full use of all the sources it could find. It is based on primary texts (metrical romances, Tagalog novels, comic books, romance novels) and their paratexts; secondary materials that included not only scholarly studies (published and unpublished), bibliographies, and catalogues of libraries and publishers but also articles and advertisements in newspapers and magazines, almanacs, national censuses, government and institution reports; personal interviews and e-mail correspondences with some Filipino publishers, writers, scholars, and readers; and selected sites on the Internet. The printed sources used in this study are from the collections of the University of the Philippines Main Library (in Diliman, Quezon City), the Damiana L. Eugenio Folklore Room of the Department of English and Comparative Literature of UP Diliman, the Philippine National Library, the School of Oriental and African Studies Library, the University of London Library, and the British Library.

This study is, in a sense, an expedition. It is an initial effort at exploring the immense terrain of the history of the book in the Philippines. Hopefully it will leave deep enough tracks for other explorers to follow so that wider ground may be charted and greater heights may be reached, so that the History of the Book may arrive at last

in the Philippines and the place awaiting it in Philippine Studies may finally be claimed.

CHAPTER ONE

A SURVEY OF PHILIPPINE BOOK HISTORY (1593-2003)

The history of the book in the Philippines begins not in the archipelago itself but far away from its shores, at a time when no book in codex form existed and when printing was not even practised in the islands. For while the natives of what would be named eventually as *las Islas Filipinas* (the Philippine Islands) had a remarkable level of literacy, a literary tradition, and a civilisation of their own, they had no such things as books.¹ In Spain, however, the authorities were not only familiar with the objects but also evidently well aware of the power they possessed. The Spanish throne sought to exercise a firm control over books as it expanded its realm into new territories outside Europe. By the time Miguel Lopez de Legazpi established Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines, in the southern island of Cebu in 1565, a number of royal decrees on books had already been in place for years.² In 1531, acting in behalf of the Spanish

¹ In an early seventeenth-century account, the Jesuit friar Pedro Chirino notes, 'All islanders are much given to reading and writing, and there is hardly a man and much less a woman, who does not read and write in the letters used in the island of Manila.... They used to write on reeds and palm-leaves, using as pen an iron point'. However, writing was used mainly for the exchange of letters. Religion, government, and literature were founded on oral tradition. In *Relación de las Islas Filipinas i de lo que en ellas trabajado los padres de la Compañia de Jesus* (Rome: Esteban Paulino, 1604; repr. Manila: Imprenta de Esteban Balbas, 1890), pp. 39, 52; quoted and trans. in Vicente S. Hernández, *History of Books and Libraries in the Philippines 1521-1900* (Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 1996), pp. 13, 15. Other evidences of ancient Philippine writing have been found in metal inscriptions, earthenware vessels, and bamboo cylinders. See William Henry Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994).

² Legazpi's conquest of the Philippines was preceded by the expeditions of Ferdinand Magellan, who arrived in 1521; Garcia Jofre de Loaisa and Juan Sebastain del Cano, 1526; Alonso de Saavedra Cerón, 1528; and Ruy Lopez de Villalobos, 1543—none of which succeeded in establishing a permanent Spanish settlement in the islands. See Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People*, 8th edn (Quezon City: Garotech Publishing, 1990), pp. 71-5.

monarch Charles I, Queen Isabella issued an instruction that no books of fiction or of secular matters were to be brought to the Spanish colonies; only those relating to the Christian religion and morality were allowed transmission.³ The Prince, who would later become Philip II and for whom the islands were named, reinforced this instruction in 1543 with another command which not only prohibited the entry of books of profanity and fiction into the Indies but also forbade the printing, selling, and bearing of such items in the colonies, for they were considered detrimental to the establishment of the authenticity and authority of the Christian faith.⁴ In 1556, the first year of his reign as king of Spain, Philip II signed an order stating that the printing or sale of any book on the Indies is not permitted unless it has special licence from the Royal Council of Indies.⁵ Thus, even before Spain succeeded in conquering the islands, the book in the future colony was already marked by restrictions. As the Spanish regime spread and strengthened throughout the archipelago, the book would be subject to further control and would consequently assume a character that conformed to the designs of the colonial authorities—the Spanish throne and, more importantly, the Roman Catholic Church.

³ Seville, Archivo General de Indias, Indiferente general, *Contratación*, 148-2-2, Provision by the Queen to the House of Trade in Ocaña, 4 April 1531; quoted in trans. in Irving A. Leonard, *Books of the Brave: Being an Account of Books and of Men in the Spanish Conquest and Settlement of the Sixteenth-Century New World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949; repr. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 81.

⁴ The order says, 'Que no consientan en las Indias libros profanos y fabulosos. Porque de llevarse à las Indias libros de Romance, que traten de materias profanas, y fabulosas historias fingidas se siguen muchos inconvenientes: Mandamos à la Virreyes, Audencias y Governadores, que no los consientan imprimir, vender, tener, ni llevar à sus distritos, y provean, que ningun Español, ni Indio los lea', in *Recopilacion de leyes de los reynos de las Indias. Mandada imprimir y publicar por la Magestad Catolica del Rey Don Carlos II*, 4 vols (Madrid: Antonio Balbas, 1756), I, law iij, title xxiv. Quoted in Hernández, p. 107.

The special attention paid by the royal decrees to secular books attests to the immense popularity of chivalric romances and sentimental novels in Spain during the sixteenth century. See Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450-1800*, trans. by David Gerard (London: Verso, 1976; repr. 1998), p. 286.

⁵ The law in part reads, 'no consientan ni permitan que se imprima ni venda ningún libro que trate de materias de Indias, no teniendo especial licencia despechada por nuestro Consejo Real de las Indias', in *Recopilacion de leyes de los reynos de las Indias*, I, law i, title xxiv. Quoted in José Toribio Medina, *La imprenta en Manila desde sus origenes hasta 1810* (Santiago de Chile: Impreso y grabado en casa del autor, 1896), p. xxiv.

Legazpi, the first Governor-General of the Philippines, moved the colonial administration to the north and made Manila the capital city in 1571. The religious orders began arriving thereafter, joining the Augustinians who had first arrived with Legazpi in 1565: the Franciscans came in 1578, the Jesuits in 1581, the Dominicans in 1587, and the Recollects in 1606. They all shared the grand mission of converting the *indios* (natives) to Christianity, which was in line with the Spanish colonial policy of pacifying the islands through religious indoctrination. Manila was made a diocese in 1579, and the first bishop Domingo de Salazar arrived in 1581. Soon after, in 1583, the Inquisition of New Spain (Mexico) instituted a branch under the Holy Office of the Bishop of Manila; it was tasked with the inspection of incoming ships for books and the confiscation of volumes listed in the Index of Forbidden Books.⁶ In 1584, Philip II issued another decree on books, ordering that no grammar or vocabulary in the language of the *indios* may be published, printed, or used without the examination of the Bishop and the Royal Audencia (the colonial Supreme Court).⁷

It was in this climate of control that the Governor of the Philippines Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas wrote to Philip II on 20 June 1593 to inform the sovereign of the developments in the colony:

Sire, in the name of Your Majesty, I have for this once, because of the existing great need, granted a license for the printing of the Doctrinas Christianas, herewith enclosed—one in the Tagalog language, which is the native and best of these islands, and the other in Chinese—from which I hope great benefits will result in the conversion and instruction of the peoples of both nations; and

⁶ Pedro de los Rios, et al., 'Instructions to the Commissary of the Inquisition [in Manila]', Mexico, 1 March 1583; trans. in Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898*, 55 vols (Cleveland, Ohio: Arthur H. Clark, 1903-1909; repr. Mandaluyong: Cacho Hermanos, 1973), v, 256-73.

⁷ The law states, 'cuando se hiciese algún Arte ó Vocabulario de la lengua se los indios, no se publique ni se imprima, ni use dél, si no estuviere primero examinado por el ordinario y visto por la real Audencia', in *Recopilacion de leyes de los reynos de las Indias*, 1, law iij, title xxiv. Quoted in Medina, p. xxiv.

because the lands of the Indies are on a large scale in everything and things more expensive, I have set the price of them at four reales a piece, until Your Majesty is pleased to decree in full what is to be done.⁸

The books presented by Dasmariñas to Philip II were the *Doctrina Christiana en lengua española y tagala* and the *Hsin-k'o seng-shih Kao-mu Hsien chaun Wu-chi t'ien-chu cheng-chiao chen-chuan shih-lu*—the first books of the Philippines, both printed in Manila in 1593.

THE EARLY BOOKS AND PRINTING PRESSES

The *Doctrina Christiana en lengua española y tagala* (*Doctrina Christiana* in Spanish and Tagalog) was printed by xylography, a method using carved wood blocks, and consisted of 38 leaves in quarto size (20.5 x 14.2 cm).⁹ The book begins with the Spanish syllabary and Tagalog alphabet, then presents the following basic doctrines of the Catholic Church in three versions—Spanish, Tagalog in roman letters, and Tagalog in native characters: the Pater Noster, Ave Maria, Credo, Salve Regina, Articles of Faith, Ten Commandments, Commandments of the Holy Church, Sacraments, Seven Mortal Sins, Fourteen Works of Charity, Confession, and Catechism.

The author of the *Doctrina Christiana* was not identified in the book, but its title page indicates that the text was corrected by the religious orders ('corregida por los Religiosos de las ordenes') (FIGURE 1). The material was based on the Tagalog translations of the Franciscan friar Juan de Plasencia, which received approval from

⁸ Quoted in trans. in Edwin Wolf 2nd, *Doctrina Christiana: The First Book Printed in the Philippines, Manila, 1593* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1947), p. 36. Medina, in *La imprenta en Manila*, also refers to this letter and reproduces the relevant section in the original Spanish text: 'Señor: en nombre de V. M. he dado licencia para que por esta vez, por la gran necesidad que habia, se imprimiesen las doctrinas cristianas que consteban, la una en lengua tagala, que es la natural y mayor destas islas, y la otra en la china, de que espero resultará gran fructo en la conversion y doctrina de los de la una nación y de la otra, y por ser en todo las tierras de las Indias más grucsas y costosas en las cosas, las he tasado en cuatro reales cada una, hasta que en todo V. M. se sirva de ordenar lo que se ha de hacer' (p. xix).

⁹ Wolf, pp. 3-4.



FIGURE 1. Title page of the *Doctrina Christiana* in Spanish and Tagalog (1593).
 (Image reduced.)

the diocesan synod convened by Cardinal Salazar in 1582, and subsequently edited by other priests who had achieved a command of the Tagalog language.¹⁰ The title page also provides details of publication: the *Doctrina Christiana* was printed with licence at the San Gabriel church of the Dominican order ('Impressa con licencia en S. Gabriel de la orden de S. Domingo') in Manila in 1593. The printing of the book is believed to be the work of a Chinese craftsman, under the supervision of the Dominican friars, as evidenced by the use of woodblocks, an age-old Chinese method of printing; the oriental workmanship of the title-page illustration; and the place of publication.¹¹ The church of San Gabriel was located in the Chinese settlement outside Intramuros, the walled city of Manila.

The single extant copy of the *Doctrina Christiana*, now in the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection of the United States Library of Congress, reveals that the book was actually priced at two *reales* rather than four, as cited in the letter of Dasmariñas. On the verso of the title page, the notation 'Tassada en dos rreales' appears with the signature of Juan de Cuéllar, secretary to the Governor. While it is impossible to say with any certainty what caused this discrepancy, since no documents exist on the matter, the other book Dasmariñas referred to suggests an explanation: it had nearly twice as many pages, and it was indeed valued at four *reales*.

That other book was *Hsin-k'o seng-shih Kao-mu Hsien chaun Wu-chi t'ien-chu cheng-chiao chen-chuan shih-lu* ('A printed edition of the veritable record of the authentic tradition of the true faith in the Infinite God, by the religious master Kao-mu Hsien'). Historians have referred to the volume as the '*Shih-lu*' or '*Tratado*', after its title in Spanish translation *Tratado de la Doctrina de la Santa Iglesia y de ciencias naturales*. It is of quarto size

¹⁰ See Wolf, pp. 20-36, for a detailed discussion on the authorship of the text.

¹¹ Wolf, pp. 36-9, 42. See also P. van der Loon, 'The Manila Incunabula and Early Hokkien Studies', *Asia Major: A British Journal of Far Eastern Studies*, 12.1 (1966; repr. Manila: Philippine Historical Commission, n.d.), 1-43 (p. 8).

(18.4 x 12.9 cm), consisting of 62 numbered leaves and four unnumbered sheets folding out, printed in Chinese characters and supplemented with illustrations. Like the *Doctrina Christiana*, the book was produced by xylography. The *Shih-lu* was written in classical Chinese, mostly in dialogue form. It contains nine chapters: the first three on theological discussions, the rest on Western concepts of cosmography and natural history. The author in this case is indicated in the title as Juan Cobo (Kao-mu Hsien), a Dominican friar.¹²

Only one copy of the *Shih-lu* is known to have survived, now held at the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid. The title page of this volume is missing, but its first page provides publication details (FIGURE 2). The full title is indicated in the inner margin. On the outer margin, a notation declares:

This book has not been made without authorization, but is published with
licence of the Bishop and the Governor. When we first came to Manila, we
ordered a skilled craftsman to cut these blocks. Completed in the second
month of the spring in the year of our Lord 1593.¹³

The title and notation both seem to have been added at a later stage, according to P. van der Loon in the essay 'The Manila Incunabula and Early Hokkien Studies'. Van der Loon concludes that the impression of the *Shih-lu* took place in March 1593.¹⁴ Thereafter, it was valued at four *reales*. Cuéllar's appraisal and his signature also appear in the first page, on the tail margin.

¹² The bibliographical descriptions in this paragraph are from van der Loon, pp. 2-3. For another study on the *Shih-lu* and a facsimile of the text, see Fidel Villarroel, *Pien Cheng-Chiao Chen-Chüan Shih-lu, Testimony of the True Religion: First Book Printed in the Philippines?* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Press, 1986).

¹³ Quoted in van der Loon, p. 6.

¹⁴ p. 8.



FIGURE 2. First page of the *Shih-lu* (1593).

(Image reduced.)

The *Doctrina Christiana* and the *Shih-lu* evidently served as basic instructional materials or handbooks. However, like the catechisms, grammars, and vocabularies that would come in their wake, they were published for the Spanish friars rather than the native converts. According to John Leddy Phelan, in a study on Spanish colonialism in the Philippines,

The high costs of printing and the use of fragile rice paper ruled out the feasibility of instruction by means of written materials. Indoctrination was oral and the catechisms were for the Spanish clergy, who required accurate translations into heretofore unfamiliar languages of complex doctrinal concepts which medieval theologians had taken centuries to define.¹⁵

In his letter to Philip II, Dasmariñas makes reference to these high costs, which undoubtedly involved the purchase of paper imported from China. Paper was not produced locally then—and would not be for that matter until the 1960s. The paper brought to Manila was called China paper or silk paper or rice paper since it was thought to have been made from that grain but was actually manufactured from paper mulberry.¹⁶ The historian Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera describes it as detestable, brittle, without consistency or resistance ('detestable, quebradizo, sin resistencia ni consistencia').¹⁷ The poor quality of the paper not only factored in the oral mode of instruction practised by the Spanish colonizers but it would also pre-determine the shelf life of the early Philippine books. Copies of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts are extremely rare due to the inferior materials used in their

¹⁵ *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses 1565-1700* (Madison, Milwaukee and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p. 58.

¹⁶ Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera, *Noticias sobre la imprenta y el grabado en Filipinas* (Madrid: Tipografía de los hijos de M. G. Hernandez, 1893), pp. 9-10. See also Wolf, pp. 4-5, 42.

¹⁷ p. 9.

manufacture along with the unfavourable conditions and elements they had to bear such as the humid tropical climate, termites, floods, fires, earthquakes, and wars.

The discovery of the copies of the *Doctrina Christiana* and the *Shih-lu* in the mid-twentieth century, thus, was cause of great excitement. The *Doctrina Christiana* appeared in the antiquarian book trade in the early 1940s and was purchased by the American millionaire bibliophile Rosenwald, who donated it to the Library of Congress in 1947. The *Shih-lu* was discovered in the Biblioteca Nacional in 1952 by Rev Maurus Fang-Hao of the University of Taiwan. When the copies came to light, the matter of which one was printed first became an issue among scholars. Edwin Wolf 2nd, who produced the seminal study on the *Doctrina Christiana* to accompany the facsimile published by the Library of Congress in 1947, maintained that the Spanish-Tagalog text was the first book printed in the Philippines. Van der Loon, in the aforementioned essay that appeared in the British journal *Asia Major* in 1966, determined that the *Shih-lu* antedated the *Doctrina Christiana*. The issue was further complicated by the existence of a third book, found in the Vatican Library in Rome by Fr Jose Ma. Gonzalez in 1948. The undated volume, like the other two books, was printed by wood blocks and published by the Dominicans in Manila. Its title page reads, '*Doctrina christiana en letra y lengua china, compuesta por los padres ministros de los Sangleyes, de la Orden de sancto Domingo Con licencia, por Keng yong, china, en el parian de Manila*' (Doctrina Christiana in Chinese letters and language, prepared by the ministerial fathers of the Sangleys, of the Order of St Dominic With licence, by Keng Yong, Chinese, in the parian of Manila) (FIGURE 3). Among those who proposed that this Chinese *Doctrina Christiana* was the other volume referred to in the Dasmariñas letter and actually the first Philippine book, placing the date of printing between 1590



FIGURE 3. Title page of the Chinese *Doctrina Christiana* (c.1605-1607).

(Image reduced.)

and 1592, were the historians J. Gayo Aragón, Carlos Sanz, and Carlos Quirino.¹⁸

Van der Loon challenged this view, however, with the assessment based on bibliographic and textual evidence that the Chinese *Doctrina Christiana* was printed between the years 1605 to 1607.¹⁹ While the matter of the first book printed in the Philippines remains an open academic issue, common knowledge maintains that the earliest is the Spanish-Tagalog *Doctrina Christiana*; this is a 'fact' declared by schoolbooks, travel guides, trivia games, and television game shows.

In 1604, the book in the Philippines took on a new face with the introduction of printing by movable type. Two books printed that year are of special significance: *Libro de las quatro postrimerias del hombre en lengua tagala, y letra española* ('The Book on the Four Last Things of Man in Tagalog and Spanish) and *Ordinationes generales provinciae Sanctissimi Rosarii Philippinarum* ('The General Ordinances of the Philippine Province of the Holy Rosary).

No copy of the *Libro de las quatro postrimerias* has survived into the twentieth century. However, details of its publication have been deduced from the reprint of 1734. The book was written by Francisco Blancas de San José and printed by Juan de Vera in Binondoc, Manila.²⁰ The Dominican friar Blancas de San José was responsible for the writing and publishing of many early books in Tagalog on religious instruction and on the native language. He is recognised for introducing typography into the Philippines, but it is the Chinese Christian printer de Vera who is credited for

¹⁸ See J. Gayo Aragón and Antonio Dominguez, *Doctrina christiana: Primer libro impreso en Filipinas* (Manila: Imprenta de la Real y Pontificia Universidad de Santo Tomás de Manila, 1951); Carlos Sanz, *Primitivas relaciones de España con Asia y Oceania: Los dos primeros libros impresos en Filipinas, más tercero en discordia* (Madrid: n. pub., 1958); and Carlos Quirino, 'The First Philippine Imprints', *Journal of History*, 3.3 (September 1960), 219-28.

¹⁹ pp. 11-25.

²⁰ Van der Loon, p. 37-9.

achieving 'everything necessary to do printing'.²¹ De Vera established a printing press in the Chinese settlement of Binondoc (now Binondo) outside Intramuros, where punches were cut, matrices struck, and types cast. Van der Loon concludes that the types used for printing before 1640 all came from de Vera's foundry.²² It is believed that the *Libro de las quatro postrimerias* was the first book produced by de Vera with the new technology.²³

The distinction held by the *Ordinationes generales* is that of the earliest surviving typographical book. Only one copy is known to exist; it was purchased, too, by Rosenwald and presented to the Library of Congress shortly after his donation of the *Doctrina Christiana*. The *Ordinationes generales* is a little octavo volume of eight leaves. There can be no doubt that the book was meant for the Spanish clergy since the text is entirely in Latin, written by the Dominican Juan de Castro in Mexico in 1586. The book was published in Manila under the same order and printed as well by de Vera, who is identified in the title page (FIGURE 4).

Blancas de San José was transferred to the province of Bataan in 1608, and he continued the printing activity of the Dominican order from his new post. In 1610, he established himself as the authority on Tagalog by writing and publishing *Arte y reglas de la lengua tagala* (Art and Rules of the Tagalog Language), the first grammar of the language. The book was printed by Tomas Pinpin, who himself would author the first published book by a native. *Librong pagaaralan nang manga Tagalog nang uicang Castilla* (The Book With Which Tagalogs Can Learn Castilian) by Pinpin appeared that same

²¹ Diego Aduarte, *Historia de la Provincia del Sancto Rosario de la Orden de Predicadores en Philippinas, Iapon, y China* (Zaragoza: Santo Hospital Real, y General de Nuestra Señora de Gracia, 1640), book 2, p. 16; trans. in Blair and Robertson, xxxii, p. 53.

²² p. 26.

²³ There is a contrary claim that the first typographical book is the *Libro de nuestra Señora Rosario* (Book of Our Lady of the Rosary) by Blancas de San José, published in 1602. Based on textual evidence from contemporary sources, van der Loon determines that this book was printed by wood block (pp. 39-42). No copy of the *Libro de nuestra Señora Rosario* has survived.

year, printed in the same Dominican press by another native, Diego Talaghay (FIGURE 5). The volume, an octavo of 179 leaves, also contains a guide for confession in Tagalog and Spanish (*Interrogatorio para Confession, compuesto en ambas lenguas Tagala, y Española*) prepared by Blancas de San José.²⁴ The activities of Pinpin and Talaghay, who were both Tagalogs, ‘mark the end of the period when printing in the Philippines was organised by Chinese immigrants’.²⁵

Pinpin’s *Librong pagaaralan nang manga Tagalog*, in Tagalog and Spanish, consists of five chapters of vocabulary and grammar lessons, including six original songs (*awit*) meant for instruction and entertainment. The book is significant not only for its authorship but for its intended audience as well, which the title makes self-evident. The book suggests that there was a native readership and a native market for books in the early seventeenth century. The character of such an audience may be gleaned from Pinpin’s remarks in his prologue:

Di baquin ang ibang manga caasalan at caanyoan nang manga Castila ay inyong guinalologdan at ginagagad din ninyo sa pagdaramitan at sa nananandataman at paglacadman at madlaman ang magogol ay uala rin hinahinayang cayo dapouat macmochamocha cayo sa Castila. Ay aba itopang isang asal macatotohanang sa sapangongosap nang canila ding uica ang di sucat ibigang camtan?

(No doubt you like and imitate the ways and appearance of the Spaniards in matters of clothing and the bearing of arms and even of gait, and you do not hesitate to spend a great deal so that you may resemble the Spaniards.

²⁴ Pinpin’s *Librong pagaaralan nang manga Tagalog*, in turn, appeared as an appendix to Blancas de San José’s *Arte y reglas* in 1752. This second edition of both books, in one volume, was published by the press of the Colegio y Universidad de Santo Tomas in Manila.

²⁵ Van der Loon, p. 39.

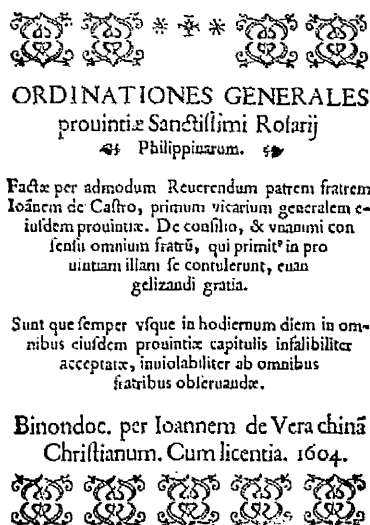


FIGURE 4. Title page of *Ordinationes generales* (1604).

(Image reduced.)

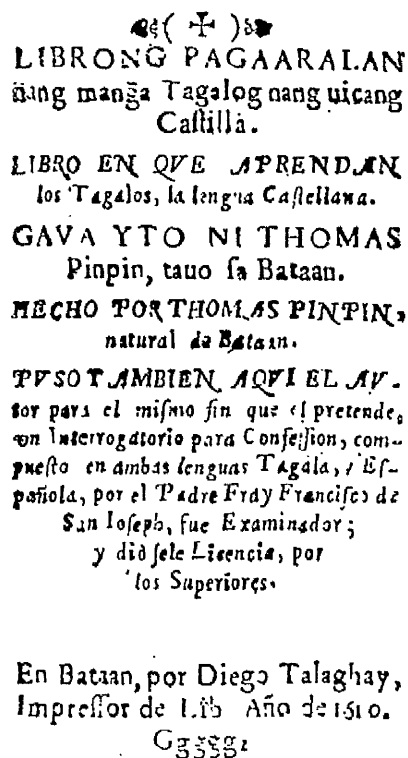


FIGURE 5. Title page of *Librong pagaaralan nang manga Tagalog nang uicang Castilla* (1610) by Tomas Pinpin.

(Image reduced.)

Therefore would you not like to acquire as well this other trait which is their language?)²⁶

It is interesting to note that Filipinos in general never did really acquire the language of the Spaniards. As the historian Vicente L. Rafael points out, 'Less than 1 percent of the population has ever been fluent in Spanish at any given moment in Spain's 350 years of colonial rule'.²⁷ This small percentage came from the upper class, who could afford to have their children educated in Spanish institutions and who evidently, in Pinpin's time, could afford to buy books, among other things. Dealing with the language of the colonizer rather than the colonized, *Librong pagaaralan nang manga Tagalog* is a unique effort and a valuable social document. It tells of the hispanization of Philippine society in the early colonial period and the 'colonial mentality' (the preference for things Western) that would pervade in the Filipino consciousness throughout the years.

In 1618, the Augustinians established the second printing press in the Philippines. They imported the machinery from Japan and set up shop in the town of Bacolor, eventually moving to Manila in 1621. The printing press was sold to the Jesuits in 1623.²⁸ The earliest imprint attributed to the Jesuit press is dated 1629. However, the printing activity of the order evidently began much earlier. In 1602, the Jesuits produced, most likely by wood blocks, leaflets of drawings of saints, which were

²⁶ Quoted and trans. in Vicente L. Rafael, 'Tomas Pinpin and the Shock of Castilian', in *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under the Spanish Rule* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998), pp. 55-83 (pp. 57-8). Rafael offers an engaging study on the role of language in the religious conversion of the Tagalogs.

²⁷ 'Taglish, or the Phantom Power of the Lingua Franca', in *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), pp. 162-89 (p. 168).

²⁸ W. E. Retana, *Tablas cronológica y alfabética de Imprentas é Impresores de Filipinas (1593-1898)* (Madrid: Librería General de Victoriano Suárez, 1908), p. 91.

distributed to the people of Manila on All Saints' Day.²⁹ The first book published by the order in the Philippines appeared in 1610, but it has not been determined whether or not the Jesuits printed this themselves.³⁰ The Philippine bibliographer W. E. Retana believes that the Jesuit press could not have been established before 1622.³¹ The Franciscans set up their printing press in 1692 in Sampaloc, a suburb of Manila, then transferred the facility to the town of Tayabas in 1700.³²

The progress of printing in the Philippines, while concentrated in Luzon or more specifically in Manila, led to the publication of books written in other native languages. The first of these were *Doctrina christiana Rob. Bellarmini in linguam bisayam translata* (1610) in Visayan by Cristóbal Jiménez; *Arte de la lengua Pampanga* (1617) in Kapampangan by Francisco Coronel; *Libro a naisuratan amin a bagas ti Doctrina Cristiana* (1621) in Iloko by Francisco Lopez; and *Arte de la lengua Bicolana* (1647) in Bikol by Andres de San Agustin. As in the case of the books in Tagalog, the first books in the vernaculars were either on religion or language and were written by friars primarily for fellow friars to aid them in their mission of conversion.

As for the native reception to the emerging print culture, the comment of the Augustinian Juan de Medina, made in 1630, is revealing. Medina says of the Visayan *Doctrina Christiana* (1610) published by the Jesuits:

... I think it was at more cost than gain; for to imagine that the Indian will buy a book is a ridiculous notion. And even if he had it, he would be too lazy to

²⁹ H. de la Costa, S.J., *The Jesuits in the Philippines 1581-1768* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 202-3.

³⁰ De la Costa, pp. 620-1.

³¹ *La imprenta en Filipinas: Adiciones y observaciones á La Imprenta en Manila de D. J. T. Medina* (Madrid: Imprenta de la viuda M. Minuesa de Los Ríos, 1897) p. 39.

³² Hernández, p. 40.

read it. This is the reason why so little has been printed in all the languages in these regions.³³

It is not surprising that the natives did not take readily to reading much less to buying books. Aside from the limited access the natives had to books, due to the high price of the items and the alphabet used in the texts which was still largely alien to most, what Medina's account does not take note of is the fact that culture and tradition in the islands were predominantly oral. For instance, it was not uncommon for popular literary texts to be copied from the printed version and circulated in manuscript, then memorised and transmitted orally in performance. This practice continued well into the nineteenth century. During the early colonial period, print existed alongside the oral tradition, not quite displacing it. In some cases, the oral tradition prevailed over print, as in seventeenth-century Tagalog poetry, which in written form displayed a quality inferior to that of oral poetry.³⁴ In Manila, however, reading seemed to have been more common among the natives. Of the city's residents during the 1650s, the Dominican Domingo Fernandez Navarrete notes, 'They possess fine books in their language, which have been printed by the religious. They are fond of reading these, and to our labor and their docility is this fact owing'.³⁵ But the situation in Manila was hardly representative of that in the rest of the islands. It would not be until the nineteenth century when the culture of print, along with it a reading habit, would take root throughout the archipelago.

³³ *Historia de la orden de S. Agustin de estas Islas Filipinas* (Manila: Tipo-litografia de Chofré y Ca, 1893); trans. in Blair and Robertson, XXIII, 119-297 (p. 230).

³⁴ Bienvenido L. Lumbea, *Tagalog Poetry 1570-1898: Tradition and Influences in its Development* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1986), p. 48.

³⁵ 'Manila and the Philippines about 1650', in *Tratados historicos* (Madrid, 1676); trans. in Blair and Robertson, XXXVII, 283-306 (p. 297).

EARLY LITERARY FORMS IN PRINT

In 1703, the Jesuit press published *Manga panalanging pagtatagobila sa caloloua nang taoung naghihingalo* (Prayers of Instruction for the Souls of Dying People), a Tagalog translation by Gaspar Aquino de Belen of the Spanish version of *Ordo Commendationis Animarum* by the friar Thomas de Villacastin. Like Pinpin, Aquino de Belen was a native printer who occasionally ventured into writing; he ran the Jesuit press from 1704 to 1716.³⁶ What is remarkable about this volume is the text printed together with it, *Ang Mahal na Passion ni Jesucristong P. Nacion na tola at ipinanagang sa cataastaasang Poong Jesus Nazareno* (The Sacred Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ in Verse and Dedicated to the Highest Lord Jesus the Nazarene) authored by Aquino de Belen. It is 'the first of its kind in the history of Tagalog literature, the first written narrative poem'.³⁷ Aquino de Belen's poem, made up of 930 stanzas, recounts in twenty-two episodes the events in the Passion of Christ from the Last Supper to the Resurrection, with fifteen lessons (*aral*) interspersed at irregular intervals.³⁸ *Manga panalanging*, along with *Mahal na Passion*, was in its fifth printing in 1760; subsequent editions appeared in 1815 and 1846.³⁹ After Aquino de Belen's *Mahal na Passion*, there appeared three other Tagalog versions of the *pasyon*, as the religious verse came to be known as a type: *Pasion de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo* (Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ) by Don Luis Guian, a Tagalog gentleman, published in 1740; *Casaysayan nang Pasiong Mahal ni Jesucristong Panginoon Natin na Sucat Ipag-alab nang Puso Nang Sinomang Babasa* (Account of the Sacred Passion of Jesus Christ Our Lord That Would Enflame the Heart of Any Reader) by

³⁶ After leaving the Dominican press, Pinpin himself became master printer of the Jesuit facility for around a decade, beginning in 1629 (Medina, p. xxxix).

³⁷ Lumbera, p. 57.

³⁸ Lumbera, p. 57.

³⁹ See Regalado Trota Jose, *Impreso: Philippine Imprints, 1593-1811* (Makati: Fundación Santiago and Ayala Foundation, 1993), p. 96.

an anonymous writer, published in 1814; and *El libro de la vida: historia sagrada con santas reflexiones y doctrinas morales para la vida cristiana en verso tagalo* (The Book of Life: Sacred History with Holy Reflections and Moral Doctrines for the Christian Life in Tagalog Verse) by the priest Aniceto de la Merced, published in 1852.⁴⁰ Of all the *pasyon* versions in Tagalog, it was the *Casaysayan* (1814), consisting of around 2600 stanzas, that was most re-issued and reprinted. At least eight editions were published from 1815 to 1891.⁴¹ The *Casaysayan* came to be referred to also as the '*Pasyon Pilapil*', after Mariano Pilapil, one of the several priests who revised the original anonymous text. It was the most common Tagalog text used in the nineteenth century for the *pabasa*, the practice of reading aloud or chanting the *pasyon* traditionally held during Holy Week in every Christian barrio in the Philippines, a custom still observed up to this day. The *pasyon* was adapted for stage as the *cenaculo* (Passion play), which is also performed during the Lenten season. Various versions of the *pasyon* in other native languages were published beginning in the mid-1880s.⁴² *Pasyons* continued to be printed well into the twentieth century.

Along with the *pasyon*, another early literary form in print that gained popularity was 'the life of the saint'. Written in prose or verse, these accounts of the lives and deeds of saints appeared in brief form as prefatory material in novenas or in extended form as narratives in pamphlets. The texts are 'of a pattern, obviously culled from Spanish sourcebooks available to the religious who produced them, and reduced to

⁴⁰ René B. Javellana, S.J., 'Introduction', in *Casaysayan Nang Pasiong Mahal ni Jesucristong Panginoon Natin Na Sucat na Ipag-alab nang Puso nang Sinomang Babasa* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1988), pp. 1-42 (p. 9).

⁴¹ Javellana lists the following *Casaysayan* editions that appeared during the Spanish colonial period: 1815, 1845, 1826, 1859, 1870, 1873, 1882, and 1891 (p. 16).

⁴² Javellana cites the first datable translation as *Pasion na cataon tin Jesucristo*, written in Pangasinan (the language in the northern province of Pangasinan) and published in 1855 (p. 10).

such elements as were necessary for the inspiration of native readers'.⁴³ One such account is *Aral na tunay na totoong pag aacay sa tauo nang manga cabanalang gaua nang manga maloulhating santos na sina Barlaan at Josaphat* (Lessons on the True Aid to Mankind of the Holy Works of the Glorious Saints Barlaan and Josaphat), translated into Tagalog by the Jesuit Antonio de Borja and published by the press of his order in 1712. The narrative of Barlaan and Josaphat, which had long been popular in Spain, first came to print in the Philippines in a Spanish version by the Dominican Baltazar Sancta Cruz, based on the Latin translation by Jacobo Biblio of the Greek text of St John Damascene, published by the Dominican press in 1692.⁴⁴ As a tale of the Christian conversion of heathens in India by the 'saints' Barlaan and Josaphat, the narrative must have seemed especially relevant to Borja and other Spanish missionaries and useful in their mission of indoctrination.⁴⁵ At the time of the publication of Borja's Tagalog translation, the Jesuit order was itself in the process of converting heathens and establishing their religious province in a non-Christian land. *Barlaan at Josaphat* was evidently well received in its day and went on to be reprinted in the nineteenth century. It is the one text of its type that has been given notice by Philippine literary history. The survival of the book perhaps had something to do with its length: at 332 leaves, it was substantial enough to withstand wear and tear compared with the many other lives of the saints, some of which came in ephemeral pamphlets of as little as ten leaves.⁴⁶

⁴³ Resil B. Mojares, *Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel: A Generic Study of the Novel Until 1940*, 2nd edn (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1998), p. 56.

⁴⁴ See Jose, p. 89.

⁴⁵ Mojares, p. 58. The narrative actually has no historical basis, and Barlaan and Josaphat are themselves not Christian saints. Mojares provides details on the source of the narrative and examines Borja's *Barlaan at Josaphat* at length; see pp. 57-9.

⁴⁶ A new critical edition, *Barlaan at Josaphat: Modernisadong Edisyon ng Salin ni Fray Antonio de Borja*, edited by Virgilio S. Almario, was published by the Ateneo de Manila University Press in 2003.

The most popular literary form during the entire Spanish colonial period is the metrical romance, the very type of secular material that the sixteenth-century royal decrees prohibited from entering the colony. Initially, the romances were transmitted orally by the colonizers and evidently gripped the local imagination that they came to be produced by the natives and eventually written down beginning in the eighteenth century. As a poetic form, the metrical romance took on two distinct types in the Philippines: the dodecasyllabic *awit* and the octosyllabic *corrido*. Their sources were the sagas of Charlemagne, Arthur, and the Fall of Troy; the legends and history of Spain and the Spanish *libros de caballerias* (chivalry books); local folklore; the lives of the saints and the Bible.⁴⁷ 'These romances provided a temporary release from the harsh realities of existence. They were, moreover, the only reading matter that the masses could safely enjoy during a period of strict political and literary censorship'.⁴⁸ While they were secular texts, the romances were filled with religious elements and marked by heavy didacticism. Their appeal was tremendous. They were circulated in manuscript, memorised, and sung by local bards. Like the *pasyon*, the *awit* and *corrido* extended into performance: they were quoted in oral verse contests (*duplo*), and their plots were adapted in shadowgraphs (*carillo*) and comedy plays (*moro-moro* or *komedya*).⁴⁹

While metrical romances may well have been printed in the late eighteenth century, no copies from that period have survived. They were certainly produced in large numbers in various local languages during the nineteenth century; in Tagalog alone there were around two hundred titles published.⁵⁰ 'They were printed in the cities and towns and then hawked, sold in sidewalk stalls, and brought to the most

⁴⁷ Damiana L. Eugenio, *Awit and Corrido: Philippine Metrical Romances* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1987), pp. xix-xxi.

⁴⁸ Eugenio, p. xvii.

⁴⁹ Mojares, p. 59.

⁵⁰ Eugenio, p. xvii.

remote *barrios* by itinerant peddlers'.⁵¹ They appeared as thin pamphlets on cheap rice paper and cost five or ten centavos each.⁵² Metrical romances would remain popular until the early decades of the twentieth century. One particular work of such type, first published in 1838, would survive to become a classic in Philippine literature and part of the national heritage.

During the period of 1593 to 1811, the printing presses in the Philippines collectively produced around 1000 titles, as documented by Regalado Trota Jose in the catalogue *Impreso: Philippine Imprints, 1593-1811*. The texts were mainly produced by the religious orders—from novenas to the saints, homilies, spiritual guides, church regulations, and aids to a good death to grammars and vocabularies of the various Philippine languages, treatises on logic, recipes for herbal medicine, and historical accounts. Non-secular materials were written by naval captains, lawyers, economic societies, guilds, and scientific observers. The texts of this period were written in Spanish, Latin, Tagalog, other Philippine languages, Chinese, Japanese, and Portuguese.⁵³

The year 1811 is significant as an end point, for that date marked the appearance of the first newspaper in the Philippines. On 8 August, the first issue of *Del Superior Gobierno* came out. Its editor was the Governor Manuel Fernandez del Folgueras. The publication did not cover the local scene; instead, it served to keep the Spaniards in the Philippines informed on doings in the Spanish Cortes and on the war between Spain and France. The newspaper ran for fifteen issues.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Eugenio, p. xviii.

⁵² Carlos Quirino, 'Preface', in *Mabini's Version of "Florante at Laura"* (Manila: National Heroes Commission, 1964), pp. v-viii (p. vi).

⁵³ Jose, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Jose Luna Castro, 'Press', *Philippine Mass Media in Perspective*, ed. by Gloria D. Feliciano and Crispulo J. Icbán Jr (Quezon City: Capitol Publishing House, 1967), pp. 1-21 (pp. 3-4).

Del Superior Gobierno 'ushered a new era in the history of printing. There was a virtual publishing explosion after [1811], which went hand in hand with the opening of printing presses in other parts of the country'.⁵⁵ Since the establishment of journalism in the Philippines, the publication of periodicals has always been a more active, more influential, and more profitable enterprise than book publishing. Late in the nineteenth century till the second half of the twentieth, literary writers published primarily in periodicals rather than in books.

In 1838, the metrical romance *Pinagdaanang Buhay ni Florante at ni Laura sa kahariang Albania* (The History of Florante and Laura in the Kingdom of Albania) by Francisco Baltazar was published in Manila by the Colegio de Santo Tomás press.⁵⁶ The poem, an *awit* comprising 399 monorhyming dodecasyllabic quatrains in Tagalog, tells of the trials and the triumph of the love between the Albanian Duke Florante and the Princess of Crotona Laura.⁵⁷ But Balagtas, as Baltazar is more popularly known, evidently meant *Florante at Laura* to be more than a mere love story, for he hints at other levels of meaning in his preface. His fantastic characters and settings thus came to be regarded as symbolic and *Florante at Laura* consequently read as a depiction of the sufferings of the Filipino people under the oppressive Spanish colonial regime. Balagtas was thought to have employed elements so far removed from nineteenth-century Philippine society to get his poem past the strict censorship during his time.

⁵⁵ Jose, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Hermenegildo Cruz, *Kin Sino Ang Kumathâ Ng "Florante": Kasaysayan Ng Buhay ni Francisco Baltazar at Pag-Uulat Nang Kanyang Karunungan't Kadakilaan* (Maynila: Librería "Manila Filatélico", 1906), p. 39. While generally accepted by scholars, the date and details of this first edition remain conjectural due to the absence of bibliographical and typographical evidence.

⁵⁷ The full title declares that the text was 'based on various "historical scenes" or portraits relating events in ancient times in the Greek Empire and written by one who delights in Tagalog verse' (*kinuha sa madlang 'cuadro historico' o pinturang nagsasabi sa mga nangyayari nang unang panahon sa imperio ng Grecia at tinula ng isang matuwain sa bersong Tagalog*).

Florante at Laura was popular in its day. At least five more editions by different publishers are known to have been printed before Balagtas's death in 1862. The reputation of the poem grew through the years, particularly around the time of the Philippine Revolution against Spain (1896-98) on to the early years of the American Occupation (1898-1946) in the twentieth century. It was cherished as a stirring piece of patriotism and hailed as the best poem written in Tagalog. Many editions were issued by various publishers. By 1906, an estimated 106,000 copies of the poem had been printed since its first appearance—a phenomenal figure for Philippine literary publishing.⁵⁸ After the proclamation of Tagalog as the basis of the national language in 1937, *Florante at Laura* soon found its place in the national curriculum. It has been published primarily as a textbook since then (FIGURE 6). Currently, it is required reading in all high schools in the Philippines. In the course of its twentieth-century publishing history, *Florante at Laura* has seen print in many forms and in translations into other Philippine and foreign languages. It has also been adapted for various performances and media. *Florante at Laura* is a unique case in the history of Philippine literature and publishing. It is the only Filipino poem that has never gone out of print since its first publication and that continues to be read to this day.⁵⁹ Balagtas is now recognised as the greatest Tagalog poet and as a Filipino hero.

THE GROWTH OF PRINTING DURING THE SPANISH COLONIAL PERIOD

In 1856, the Comisión Permanente de Censura (Permanent Commission of Censorship) was established in the Philippines, although censorship had always existed in one form or another since the beginning of the Spanish colonial regime. The creation of the Comisión systematised the control over the introduction, circulation,

⁵⁸ Cruz, p. 39.

⁵⁹ For a publishing history of the poem, see Patricia May B. Jurilla, 'Florante at Laura and the History of the Filipino Book', *Book History*, 8 (2005), pp. 131-96.



FIGURE 6. Front covers of *Florante at Laura* from the textbooks published by: (a) Mga Aklatan ni Juliana Martinez, 1938, (b) Philippine Education Company, 1948, (c) Philippine Book Company, 1971, and (d) Vicarish Publication & Trading, 2002.

(Images reduced; reproduced from the copies of (a, b & c) the University of the Philippines Main Library, Filipiniana Section.)

and printing of books, newspapers, and magazines in the islands. Prints, paintings, engravings, and public performances were also subject to censorship. The body was made up of the Fiscal of the Audencia, as head, and eight censors: four appointed by the Governor and the other four by the Archbishop.

The establishment of the Comisión, as well as the government's issuing of rules for printing in 1857, came in the midst of great events that changed the medieval life in the colony. The cities were opened to international trade—Manila in 1834; Pangasinan, Iloilo, and Zamboanga in 1855; Cebu in 1860; Legaspi and Leyte in 1873. In 1863, the establishment of public primary education was authorised, and a normal school in Manila was instituted. 'Before that date public schools were hardly known in the Philippines, and instruction was confined solely to children of parents able to pay for it'.⁶⁰ The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 made travel between Spain and the Philippines shorter, safer, and speedier; consequently, not only men but also ideas filtered into the country.⁶¹ European liberalism began to enlighten, inspire, and transform the natives.

Among the consequences of these events was the growth of printing in the Philippines. New and private presses were established all around the country, ending the monopoly over printing long held by the religious orders. The activity started in Manila in the late 1830s. Among the more prominent private presses were Los Amigos del País (1846); Ramírez y Giraudier (1858), the first typo-lithographic press in the Philippines; Don Estéban Balbás (1880); and Chofré y Ca (1880). Private presses in other cities of the country were set up beginning in the 1870s. In 1871, the first copyright law in the Philippines was passed. Governor Rafael de Izquierdo

⁶⁰ Tomás G. Del Rosario, '[Education] Under Spanish Rule', in *Census of the Philippine Islands, Taken Under the Direction of the Philippine Commission in the Year 1903*, 4 vols (Washington: US Bureau of the Census, 1905), III, 576-637 (p. 576).

⁶¹ Agoncillo, *History*, p. 119.

signed a decree which provided that, 'No petition for permission to print and annotate the text of any type of work should be granted, unless it comes from the owners of the works or from the authors themselves or from those fully authorized as such'.⁶²

Perhaps the most significant consequence of the great events of the mid-nineteenth century was the emergence of the movements for reform and for revolution. The Reform Movement grew out of the new middle class made up of *mestizos* (half-breeds) who had acquired wealth and education. Among these Filipinos, there was much dissatisfaction with the abusive Spanish government and clergy.⁶³ They sought to make the Philippines a province of Spain, which would gain the islands representation in the Spanish Cortes, protection from the abuses of the Spanish authorities, and possibly relief from paying unreasonable taxes.⁶⁴ The sons of these Filipinos who were studying in Spain organised themselves in support of reforms for their country. One of them was Jose Rizal, who had gone to Madrid in 1882 to study medicine; he would also educate himself on a wide variety of subjects, travel around Europe, and master six languages.⁶⁵ Among his many contributions to the Reform Movement, and ultimately to the nation that the Philippines would become, the greatest are two books. Filipinos have come to refer to them as the *Noli* and the *Fili* (FIGURE 7).

RIZAL'S NOVELS AND THE PHILIPPINE REVOLUTION

In 1884, Rizal began writing a novel in Spanish. Its central figure is Crisostomo Ibarra, an idealistic young man who returns to the Philippines after his studies in

⁶² Quoted in Hernández, p. 148.

⁶³ The term 'Filipino' first came to be used as a pejorative in the nineteenth century. Spanish society in the Philippines at that time consisted of two classes: the *peninsulares* (Spaniards born in Spain) and the *insulares* (Spaniards born in the Philippines). The *peninsulares* looked down at the *insulares* and contemptuously called them 'Filipinos'. As for the natives, they were always called *indios*. It was only in 1898, when the *indios* began to be called Filipinos. Agoncillo, *History*, pp. 129-30.

⁶⁴ Agoncillo, *History*, p. 131.

⁶⁵ Aside from being a physician, Rizal was a journalist, novelist, poet, and artist. He was fluent in Tagalog, Spanish, German, French, English, and Italian.



FIGURE 7. Jose Rizal's novels: (a) first edition of *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) with the cover designed and illustrated by Rizal himself; (b) title page of Rizal's manuscript of *El Filibusterismo* (1891); (c) first page of the first chapter of the *El Filibusterismo* manuscript.

(Images reduced; reproduced from Chando P. Morillos, *Treasures of the National Library: A Brief History of the Premier Library in the Philippines* (Manila: National Library, 1998), pp. 55, 59, 60.)

Spain and becomes ensnared in the troubles of his homeland. Intended as an accurate depiction of nineteenth-century Philippine society, the novel inevitably drew an ugly picture of the Spanish friar, one of the most powerful and most corruptible figures in the islands. Rizal was in Germany, specialising in ophthalmology, when he finished his novel. In February 1887, at the age of 26, he published *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not). Borrowing money from compatriot Maximo Viola to pay the printing costs, Rizal had the novel printed in Berlin in an edition of 2000 copies. He sent copies to a select group of friends in Europe, one to the Governor of the Philippines, and another to the Archbishop of Manila; the rest of the copies were crated for dispatch to Spain and the Philippines.⁶⁶

Rizal encountered many problems with the distribution of the book—the unreliability of friends whom he had tapped as agents, delays in customs, and trouble with the censors. His biographer León Ma. Guerrero describes the ‘whole business’ as ‘most unprofessional, most impractical’: Rizal did not set a fixed price for the book; he evidently did not keep a record of its distribution and sales; and he did not make any money out of it. An estimated 1000 copies, at most, reached Filipino readers in Rizal’s lifetime.⁶⁷

Rizal returned to the Philippines in August 1887. Smuggled copies of the *Noli* had already found their way to Manila ahead of him and were selling briskly at the shop La Gran Bretaña. When there were no more copies available, with the rest of the edition held up in customs, circulation did not cease. ‘Second-hand copies not more than a few days old were a week later being sold as third-hand copies, while all the

⁶⁶ Austin Coates, *Rizal: Philippine Nationalist and Martyr* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 109.

⁶⁷ *The First Filipino: A Biography of José Rizal* (Manila: National Historical Commission, 1963; 4th repr. 1971), pp. 147-8.

time the price rose....'⁶⁸ Most of the copies circulating in the Philippines 'had pasted-on covers marked "Gems of Spanish Verse, Vol. II", or something equally innocuous'.⁶⁹

The *Noli*, as expected, did not please authorities in the Philippines. A special committee of the University of Santo Tomas, formed at the request of the Archbishop of Manila, declared the novel 'heretical, impious and scandalous in its religious aspect, and unpatriotic, subversive of public order and harmful to the Spanish Government and its administration of these islands, in its political aspect'.⁷⁰ On 29 December 1887, the censors banned the book. Rizal left the country in February 1888.

Rizal wrote and published his second novel outside the Philippines as well. It was entitled *El Filibusterismo* (The Filibuster); it was also in Spanish; and it was the sequel to the *Noli*.⁷¹ In the *Fili*, Ibarra has transformed himself overseas into Simoun and has gained immense wealth and influence. He returns to the Philippines and carries out a sinister plan to incite a revolution against the government. Rizal finished the novel in Brussels in May 1891. Desperate to get his book in print and nearly destitute, he moved to Ghent where printing was cheaper. The novel was cut drastically because of lack of funds, and its publication was never entirely certain until Valentin Ventura, a Filipino friend, sent Rizal money in September to cover his printing bills.⁷² That same month, Rizal made his way back to the Philippines via Hong Kong, bringing along 800 copies of his new novel.

⁶⁸ Coates, p. 124.

⁶⁹ Coates, p. 124.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Guerrero, p. 149.

⁷¹ Scholars have concluded that the likely reasons why Rizal wrote his novels in Spanish were that it was the language he knew best and that it allowed him to address the officials in the Philippines and in Spain, to raise their awareness on the situation in his country and to elicit their support for reforms.

⁷² Guerrero, pp. 273-4.

The *Fili* was not as successful as the *Noli* in reaching the Philippines undetected even if more careful arrangements were made for its distribution. The Spanish authorities learned of the existence of the second novel and 'took special precautions to prevent its entry', succeeding in intercepting and destroying a bulk of the edition in Iloilo.⁷³ 'Individual copies, sent by parcel post by friends in Hongkong, Singapore, and in Europe, entered the country.... The price, of course, rose unprecedentedly, copies being sold at anything up to 400 pesetas each'.⁷⁴

The effect of the *Noli* and the *Fili* on Philippine society was, to say the least, tremendous. The novels inspired the revolution against Spain, which broke out in August 1896 led by the secret society of the masses Kataastasan Kagalangalang na Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan (The Highest and Most Honourable Society of the Sons of the Nation), known more simply as the Katipunan, under the leadership of Andres Bonifacio.⁷⁵ Rizal was arrested, charged, and found guilty of being 'the principal organiser and the living soul of the insurrection'.⁷⁶ He was executed by musketry on 30 December 1896. The irony of his life and death is that he did not

⁷³ Coates, p. 217.

⁷⁴ Coates, p. 217.

⁷⁵ Printing played a brief but crucial role in the development of the secret society Katipunan. The Katipunan acquired a small press in 1895. With great difficulty, due to an insufficient supply of types and the clandestine nature of its operations, the Katipunan produced the first issue of its official organ *Kalayaan* (Liberty). The publication appeared in March 1896, but it was dated 18 January 1896 and its editorial used the dateline Yokohama, Japan, obviously an attempt to mislead the Spanish authorities who were not unaware of the revolutionary sentiments brewing among the Filipinos. *Kalayaan* measured 30.48 x 22.86 cm (12 x 9 in.), had only eight pages, and was issued in 2000 copies. It was rapidly distributed in Manila and the neighbouring provinces. It proved to be instrumental in the growth of the Katipunan, which had no more than 300 members from the time of its founding on 12 April 1895 to 1 January 1896. From the middle of March 1896, after the appearance of *Kalayaan*, to the outbreak of the revolution in August, the membership of the Katipunan had risen to around 30,000. The second issue of *Kalayaan* never saw print, for the Katipunan press was eventually discovered by the Spanish authorities and the revolution broke out soon after. Teodoro Agoncillo, *Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1956), pp. 76-97.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Guerrero, pp. 413.

even believe in the idea of revolution; his commitment was to reforms in the Philippines and to the assimilation of the country into Spain.

Rizal is now the national hero of the Philippines, and *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* are the principal texts in the canon of Philippine literature. Through the years, the novels have been published in numerous translations, editions, and versions as well as adapted into a variety of performances. They are required reading (in Tagalog translation) in all Philippine high schools; at the university level, a course on the life and works of Rizal is compulsory, as mandated by law (Republic Act No. 1425, also known as the 'Rizal law', 12 June 1956).

On 12 June 1898, Filipino revolutionaries declared the independence of the Philippines from Spain and consequently established a republican-style government.⁷⁷ Twelve printing presses were operating in Manila that year and one each in the nearby towns of Mandaluyong and Malabon. Ten others were scattered around the country: four in the Tagalog region, in the hotbeds of nationalistic activity (Cavite, Malolos, and Barasoain), and six in the Visayas (Jaro, Iloilo, and Cebu).⁷⁸ Nearly all the printing presses were involved in publishing nationalistic newspapers, most of which were short-lived. One of printing establishments in Manila, however, had an agenda of a different nationalism; the press was run by Americans under their Office of the Military Governor in the Philippine Islands.⁷⁹

The Philippine Independence came in the midst of the Spanish-American War (April-August 1898), which formally ended with the signing of the Treaty of Paris on

⁷⁷ For classic accounts on the Philippine Revolution and the revolutionary government, see Agoncillo's *Revolt of the Masses* and *Malolos: The Crisis of the Republic* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1960).

⁷⁸ Retana, *Tablas*, pp. 86-8.

⁷⁹ The printing and publishing activities of the American administration in the Philippines would be undertaken eventually by the Bureau of Public Printing (later renamed Bureau of Printing), created in 1901.

10 December 1898. For the Filipinos, who were allowed no say whatsoever on the treaty, it marked the termination of one colonial regime and the beginning of another: Spain sold the Philippines to America for twenty million dollars. In February 1899, Filipinos waged war against the new colonizers. While pockets of resistance led by peasant armies would persist throughout the country until 1913, the Filipino-American War officially ended in 1901 with the capture of the President of the Philippine revolutionary government Emilio Aguinaldo.⁸⁰ In the meantime, the Americans had installed its administration in Manila and set in motion its colonial policy of 'Benevolent Assimilation', an important feature of which was the 'civilisation' of the natives through education. In 1901, with the creation of the Department of Public Instruction, a secular public school system was established throughout the Philippines. American teachers began arriving that year and took on the task of educating Filipino children in English, the new medium of instruction.⁸¹ Within three years, from 1901 to 1903, 2075 schools were founded—a staggering number compared with the total of 887 private and parochial schools set up during the entire Spanish rule of more than three centuries.⁸² On 4 July 1902, as decreed by an act of the US Congress, American civil rule throughout the Philippine Islands was proclaimed.

⁸⁰ On the resistance of the peasant armies, see Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979). Ileto's invaluable study establishes connections between the *pasyon* and the peasant movements against Spanish and American colonial rule.

⁸¹ 'The 1,074 American teachers came to the Philippines in 1901 from 47 states with degrees from 192 educational institutions in the United States.... Awaiting them were 4,000 Filipino students already enrolled in 29 schools'. Mary Racelis, 'Introduction: Bearing Benevolence in the Classroom and Community', in *Bearers of Benevolence: The Thomasites and Public Education in the Philippines*, ed. by Mary Racelis and Judy Ick (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing Inc., 2001), pp. 3-20 (p. 4).

⁸² *Census of the Philippine Islands, Taken Under the Direction of the Philippine Commission in the Year 1903*, 4 vols (Washington: US Bureau of the Census, 1905), III, p. 677.

LITERARY ACTIVITY DURING THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION:
THE TAGALOG NOVEL AND PHILIPPINE LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Under the American Occupation, an order of a new world came to exist in the Philippines. The introduction of a democratic system of politics gave the Filipinos basic freedoms they never knew under the former colonial regime —despite the fact that national freedom was denied them with regulations such as the Sedition Law and the Flag Law in effect.⁸³ Massive improvements were made not only in public education but also in public health and welfare; communication and transportation; commerce, industry, and trade. Ultimately, the American Occupation weakened the monolithic grip of the Catholic Church on the consciousness of the nation.

A burst of literary activity ensued, and the marketplace reflected this with bookshops and newsstands in Manila taking on 'quite a new aspect of activity since 1898'.⁸⁴ Journalism flourished during the early years of the twentieth century with new Filipino publications appearing alongside the American-owned, English-language dailies. In Tagalog, *Ang Kapatid ng Bayan* (The Sibling of the Nation) began circulation in 1899, followed by *Ang Kalinawagan* (The Brightness, 1900) and *Muling Pagsilang* (Renaissance, 1901). Other newspapers in the regional languages were established in the major cities of the country during the same period. There was also evidently a new demand for old texts that had already become a part of the culture of the nation. Nineteenth-century novenas, lives of the saints, *pasyons*, and metrical romances were reissued and would see steady reprinting through the early decades of the twentieth century. Such texts were staples of new private enterprises as that of Juan Martinez

⁸³ The Sedition Law (Philippine Commission Act No. 292) was passed in November 1901 and kept in firm place during the early years of the Occupation. It prohibited the advocacy of the independence or separation of the Philippine Islands from the United States not only by insurrection but also by other means, such as in print or in performance. The Flag Law (Act No. 1696) prohibited the display of the Filipino flag. It was passed in September 1907 and repealed in 1919.

⁸⁴ James A. Le Roy, *Philippine Life in Town and Country* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1905), p. 107.

and of Praxedes Sayo Soriano, who would become successful stationer-bookseller-publishers in Manila during the early decades of the twentieth century.

The relatively relaxed censorship of the new order allowed not only the production of local publications but also the entry into the country of all sorts of printed materials, including formerly prohibited books. Meanwhile, new books were also circulating through the public school system. The American teachers brought with them textbooks for their Filipino students. Leading in distribution among such books was *The Baldwin Primer* by May Kirk, published in New York by the American Book Company, with 40,000 copies issued in 1901 and 50,000 in 1902 (FIGURE 8).⁸⁵ Filipino-authored textbooks would not exist until 1918, when *The Philippine Readers*, also known as the 'Osias Readers' after its author Camilo Osias, were published in the US. While books for use in the public schools began to be published locally in the 1920s, imported textbooks would dominate the market and continue to do so until the 1950s. Even books by Filipino authors for Filipino students were published in the US then imported into the country.

In literature, Rizal was as much of an influential force as he was in politics. He became 'a primary example for writers who came after him', and the novel went through 'a vigorous existence, particularly in the native languages' after the *Noli* and the *Fili*.⁸⁶ The first novel published in the Philippines, *Cababalaghan ni P. Bravo* (The Mystery of Fr Bravo) by Gabriel Beato Francisco, appeared in 1899. It was written in Tagalog and serialised in *Ang Kapatid ng Bayan* from 12 August to 8 September.⁸⁷ In the first decade of the twentieth century, novels in serial form began appearing

⁸⁵ 'Report of the General Superintendent of Education for the Year Ending September 1, 1902', in *Third Annual Report of the Philippine Commission*, 2 vols (Washington: Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Department, 1903), II, 903-1004 (p. 968).

⁸⁶ Mojares, p. 169.

⁸⁷ Mojares, p. 170.

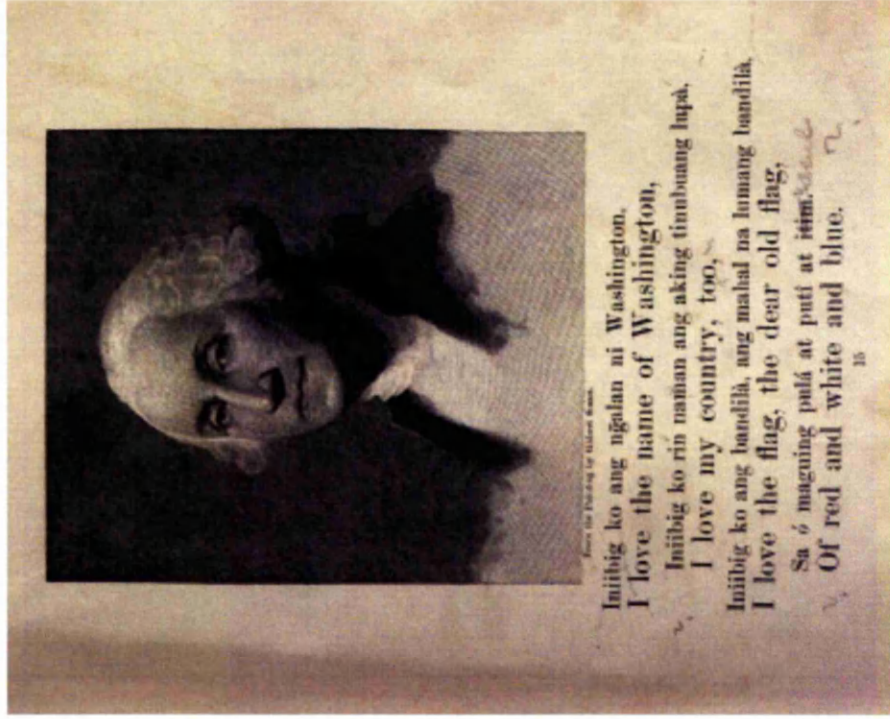
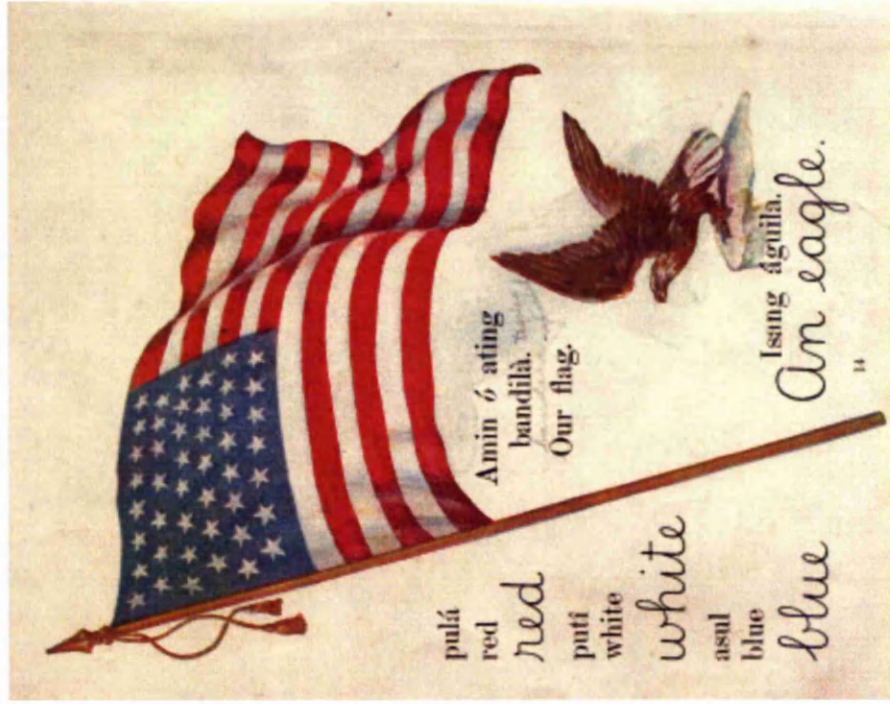


FIGURE 8. Pages from *The Baldwin Primer* (New York, c.1899), one of the first textbooks used throughout the Philippines under the public education system established by the American administration in 1901.

(Images reduced; reproduced from the American Historical Collection, Rizal Library, Ateneo de Manila University.)

regularly in Tagalog newspapers and enjoyed such an immense popularity that readers bought the papers primarily for the novels rather than the news.⁸⁸ In 1905, the first novel in book form was published: *Ang Kasaysayan ng Magkaibigang Nena at Neneng* (The Story of the Friends Nena and Neneng), written in Tagalog by Valeriano Hernandez y Peña, which had appeared as a serial in *Muling Pagsilang* in 1903. The book was issued in Manila under the imprint of Tipo-Litografia Germania. Most Tagalog novels followed the course of Hernandez's text, starting off as serial publications in periodicals and then appearing later in complete arrangement as books.

The period of 1905 to 1921 is recognised as the 'Golden Age' of the Tagalog novel, marked by the rapid development of the genre in Philippine literature.⁸⁹ In the succeeding years, the Tagalog novel would rise in number of titles published and in mass appeal, but it would decline considerably in quality. The author Iñigo Ed. Regalado blames the deterioration on the writers with no reputation and no skill who sprouted like mushrooms and sold their novels to publishers at very cheap prices. Whereas the early novelists received fees ranging from three to seven thousand pesos (P3000-7000) for their works, the new would-be writers settled for rates of one hundred to one hundred and fifty pesos (P100-150), with copyrights even surrendered to the publishers.⁹⁰ Behind the increase of writers was the proliferation of weekly

⁸⁸ Iñigo Ed. Regalado, *Ang Pagkaunlad ng Nobelang Tagalog* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1939), p. 13.

⁸⁹ Regalado, p. 17.

⁹⁰ 'Ang tunay na sanhi ng panglulupaypay ng Nobelang Tagalog ay ang pagsulpot na parang mga kábuté, nang nábanggit na taón [1921], ng mga pangahás na mánunulát na dahil sa kawalán ng pangalan at kawalán ng kasanayán ay idinuro sa halagáng nápakababà ang kaniláng mga nasulat.... Mangyari, sa halagáng isang daang piso, kálakihan na'y isáng daan at limampû, ay máipalilimbag nilá ang mga nobelang sinulat ng mga mánunulát (?) na yaón sa kahit anóng daming sipì at sa kahit na anóng daming salin, bukód sa kanilá na habàng panahón ang kathâ na di maaaring pakialamán ng tunay na ring sumulat, na di gaya ng dati na natátakdâan sa sampû o labing-limáng libo ang siping máipalilimbag at itó'y sa halagáng naglalaro sa tatlo, lima at pitong libong piso, alinsunod sa kapál at halagá ng nobela'. Regalado, pp. 17-8.

magazines, which featured novels in serial form, shorter pieces of fiction, and comic strips. *Liwayway* (Dawn), which began publication in 1922, was the most popular among the Tagalog weeklies with its initial print run of 3000 copies rising to 80,000 in a few years.⁹¹ Another factor in the decline of the Tagalog novel was the rise of the Philippine movie industry beginning in the late 1920s. When film producers started turning to the weeklies for material for their scripts, novels of high entertainment value but low artistic merit ('studio-inspired', as one editor describes it) were churned out by writers who were actually aiming for lucrative movie rights.⁹² Thus the Tagalog novel was reduced mainly to a commercial form of entertainment. From the 1903 to 1938, according to the Surian ng Wikang Pambansa (Institute of National Language), a total of 455 Tagalog novels were published.⁹³ Of this total, 328 titles were books and 121 were serials in newspapers or magazines (the remaining six titles were of unspecified form).

Meanwhile, a new type of Philippine writing was emerging, bred by the American system of education and fostered by the growth of newspapers and magazines in English. Essays, poems, short stories, and serialised novels in English by Filipino writers began appearing in the late 1920s in periodicals such as the *Philippines Free Press* (established in 1908), *The Tribune* (1926), *Graphic* (1927), *Philippines Herald Mid-Week Magazine* (1931), and *The Woman's World* (1934). Of the Filipino writer in English, Francisco Arcellana remarks:

⁹¹ Jose Esperanza Cruz, 'Malaki ang Naitulong ng mga Lingguhang Tagalog sa Paglilinang at Pagpapalaganap ng Wikang Pambansa', in *Sampaksaang ng mga Nobelistang Tagalog: Mga Panayam Tungkol sa Nobelang Tagalog na Binigkas Noong Abril 11, 1969* (Quezon City: Ang Aklatan, Unibersidad ng Pilipinas, 1974), pp. 38-44 (p. 39).

⁹² Pedrito Reyes, 'Ang Mga Naitulong ng mga Lingguhang Babasahin sa Pagpapalaganap ng Nobelang Tagalog', in *Sampaksaang ng mga Nobelistang Tagalog*, pp. 45-50 (p. 49).

⁹³ See 'Talàan ng Mga Nobelang Tagalog', in Regalado, pp. 30-46. The bibliography actually lists 469 items, but there are repetitions for some titles.

He began to learn [English] during the 1900's. By the teens, he had learned it well enough to teach it. By the early twenties, he had learned it well enough to use it for the purposes of reportage. By the later twenties he was beginning to use it for the purposes of literature: poetry (verse), plays, short stories, novels.⁹⁴

As early as 1921, however, the first book of Philippine literature in English was already in print. It was the novel *A Child of Sorrow* by Zoilo M. Galang, who published it himself. The second edition was issued in 1924—‘to meet popular demand’, according to Galang—by the American-owned Philippine Education Company (PECO), a leading publisher-bookseller of the day.⁹⁵ Other first publications in English soon followed: “*Never Mind*” and *Other Poems* by Procopio L. Solidum, a collection of poetry, initially published in Iloilo (c.1922) then in Manila by Imprenta “La Pilarica” in 1922; *Daughters for Sale, and Other Plays* by Carlos P. Romulo, a collection of plays, published in 1924; *Tales of the Philippines* by Zoilo M. Galang, a collection of stories, printed by the Fajardo Press in 1923; *Filipino Poetry* compiled by Rodolfo Dato, an anthology of contemporary poetry, published by J. S. Agustin & Sons in 1924; *Filipino Love Stories* edited by Paz Marquez-Benitez, an anthology of short stories, published by the Philippine Journal of Education in 1927; *Philippine Prose and Poetry*, an anthology published by the Bureau of Education in 1927 for use in high schools, marking the beginning of the teaching of Philippine literature in English; and *Philippine Plays* edited by Sol Gwekoh, an anthology of drama, published by PECO in 1930.⁹⁶ The publications are noteworthy as the earliest literary books in English by

⁹⁴ ‘Period of Emergence: The Short Story’, in *Brown Heritage: Essays on Philippine Cultural Tradition and Literature*, ed. by Antonio G. Manuud (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1967), pp. 603-17 (p. 607). Arcellana, now a National Artist for Literature, belonged to the second generation of Filipino writers in English.

⁹⁵ Leopoldo Y. Yabes, ‘Philippine Literature in English 1898-1957: A Bibliographical Survey’, *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review*, 22 (December 1957), 343-434 (p. 351).

⁹⁶ See Yabes, pp. 351-7.

Filipino writers rather than as products of artistic merit. Philippine literature in English would begin to come of age only in the next decade, a period of significant productivity for Filipino writers in English. The literary efforts were published mainly in periodicals, with the short story standing out as the genre of choice among the writers. Although displaying some growth, literary book publishing was still minimal and, as far as publishers were concerned, too much of a risky venture. The books that were published usually appeared in editions limited to 1000 copies, and 'these sometimes could hardly be sold even at cost'.⁹⁷ Thus, to get their books published, authors turned to patronage from rich businessmen, politicians, or government agencies, or they used their own resources and became their own publishers.⁹⁸ They also formed organisations to promote Filipino writing in English and to publish their books. One such effort was the Philippine Book Guild, formed in 1936, which sold its publications at cost price. The Guild was not all too successful, possibly because they offered no remuneration for the labours of their authors and because the market for their books, to begin with, was not large enough.⁹⁹

The literary activity of the 1930s reflected the gains of American colonial policy, which was taking its effect on the social fabric of the nation. A new elite had emerged in Philippine society: educated Filipinos fluent primarily in English, Western-orientated, and alienated from the native heritage. In literature, the use of the vernacular languages came to be relegated to material for the masses while English became the medium of high culture. Such a distinction reinforced the division between the lower and the higher (upper and middle) classes.

⁹⁷ 'Patronage, Book Making and Publishing in Manila', in *Dictionary of Philippine Biography*, by E. Arsenio Manuel, 4 vols (Quezon City: Filipiniana Publications, 1955-1995), IV (1995), 522-4 (p. 523).

⁹⁸ 'Patronage', p. 523.

⁹⁹ Herbert Schneider, S.J., 'The Period of Emergence in Philippine Letters (1930-1944)', in *Brown Heritage*, pp. 575-88 (p. 577).

In 1935, with the establishment of the Commonwealth government, the Philippines began a period of transition from colony to nation. Preparations for national independence were undertaken, and at the forefront was the issue of the national language—a particularly complex matter in the Philippines considering that there are more than one hundred native languages and dialects, that English was the medium of instruction and an official language, and that Spanish remained to be the other official language. In 1937, President Manuel L. Quezon proclaimed the language based on Tagalog as the national language of the Philippines (Executive Order No. 134, 30 December 1937). In 1940, he authorised the printing of the Tagalog-English dictionary and Tagalog grammar created by the Institute of National Language and decreed that the national language be taught at the secondary and tertiary levels in all public and private schools in the Philippines beginning 19 June 1940 (EO No. 263, 1 April 1940). Meanwhile, writers were also taking part in the building of the nation through the activities of Philippine Writers' League, established in 1939 with the aim of promoting social consciousness in writing. The League organised writers' conferences, the Commonwealth Literary Contest with the support of the government, and writing classes. It also published new titles by Filipino writers in English and reprints of Tagalog literary classics. However, the preparations for independence, the literary activity, and indeed life as the Filipinos knew it were disrupted by the invasion of the Japanese and by World War II.

THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION AND WORLD WAR II

The Japanese Occupation (1942-1945) is a harrowing period in Philippine history, marked by suppression and execution. Cultural life was inert for the most part, conducted as it was during a time of war and under the strict censorship enforced by the Office of the Japanese Military Administration. Nearly all the periodicals were

shut down or sequestered, as in the case of the newspaper *The Tribune*, and new Japanese-sponsored or directed publications appeared, such as *Pillars*, *Shin Seiki-Bagong Araw-New Day*, *Filipina*, and *Philippine Review*. In line with the policy of emancipating the Philippines from the ‘oppressive domination’ of the USA and establishing ‘the Philippines for Filipinos’ under the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, the Japanese government discouraged the use of English and instituted Tagalog as the national language.¹⁰⁰ In June 1942, *Liwayway* was allowed to re-open and soon resumed its position as the leading publication nationwide. The periodicals of the period published essays, poems, short stories, and novels in serial form. Circulation figures were high in general. According to the historian Teodoro A. Agoncillo, this was not so much ‘because the people were hungry for news and stories, but because the vendors and merchants were in need of wrapping paper and, consequently, paid a high price for paper, any paper’. Agoncillo further notes that the periodicals were used not only as wrappers but also as rolling paper for cigarettes.¹⁰¹ As for book production during the Japanese Occupation, the output was negligible: only seven titles were published in the Philippines.¹⁰²

Liberation from the Japanese came to Manila in February 1945. The city suffered massive destruction in the process of being reclaimed by American forces led by General Douglas MacArthur. Among the infrastructures bombed was the National Library, resulting in the loss of thousands of volumes, including materials printed during the Spanish colonial regime from the Rare Book Collection. Civil government was reinstated under the Commonwealth, and on 4 July 1945, MacArthur proclaimed

¹⁰⁰ Agoncillo, *History*, pp. 395-7.

¹⁰¹ *The Fateful Years: Japan's Adventure in the Philippines, 1941-45*, vol 2, 2nd edn (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2001), p. 563.

¹⁰² See *The Philippines During the Japanese Regime, 1942-1945: An Annotated List of the Literature Published in or about the Philippines During the Japanese Occupation* ([Manila]: Office of the Chief of Counter-Intelligence, Philippine Research and Information Section, 1945; repr. Manila: Biblio-Filipino, 1988).

the liberation of the entire Philippines from the enemy. Exactly a year later, the independence of the nation from the United States was declared, marking the birth of the Republic of the Philippines.

POST-WAR BOOK PUBLISHING

After the liberation, with the rise of the new republic, journalism in the Philippines thrived as it never had before. 'Printers, who were not necessarily publishers, were ... making profits hand over fist as every serviceable Minerva was pressed into service to put out a newspaper'.¹⁰³ On the other hand, book publishing did not prosper as readily or easily. The book trade still relied heavily on imported titles—American GI paperbacks shortly after the war and later, when the educational system was reorganised, textbooks from American publishers like Ginn & Company.¹⁰⁴ The businesses of the booksellers depended largely on the sales of school and office supplies; they were in essence stationers. Some of the establishments—National Book Store (established in the 1930s), Goodwill Bookstore (1938), Alemar's (1945), and Bookmark (1946)—would grow from small shops to complex enterprises with retail outlets nationwide. They would all venture into publishing, primarily textbooks, and become major players in the industry.

During the early 1950s, local book publication was meagre. In 1953, for instance, only 160 titles were registered with the national copyright office.¹⁰⁵ To be sure, not all books were copyrighted then, and it would only be in the later decades of the twentieth century when registration became standard practice among publishers. The figure, however, provides some sense of the publishing activity during the period, and the registered titles are likely to be the more earnest efforts in terms of content and

¹⁰³ Castro, p. 11.

¹⁰⁴ Andres Cristobal Cruz, 'Book Publishing', in *Philippine Mass Media in Perspective*, pp. 231-48 (p. 234).

¹⁰⁵ Leo A. Cullum, 'Literary Survey – 1953', *Philippine Studies*, 2.1 (1954), 50-8 (p. 50).

intent, of production and circulation. Nearly 50 per cent of the 160 books are textbooks; the rest of the titles are devotional books, directories, cookbooks, and miscellaneous and highly specialised publications.¹⁰⁶ The books copyrighted in the succeeding years, around 130 in 1954 and around 200 in 1955, are similarly comprised of textbooks, by over 50 per cent of the totals.¹⁰⁷ As for the publication of literary books, the output during the three years is pitiful even if some consolation is to be found in the increasing numbers: four titles in 1953, five in 1954, and six in 1955. It should be noted, however, that the figures do not necessarily reflect the state of the literary scene of the times, which was fairly lively since the end of the war and was given boost by competitions such as the *Philippines Free Press* annual short story contest (established in the 1920s and resumed in 1949) and the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature (established in 1950). Literature was being produced and published in newspapers, magazines, and journals but not so much as books.

In book publishing, the dominance of textbooks would prevail throughout the rest of the twentieth century. During the 1950s, as spurred by the growing national awareness, a demand arose for more schoolbooks not only authored by Filipinos but published by Filipinos as well. In 1951, President Elpidio Quirino issued an order prohibiting the importation of elementary textbooks and supplementary readers (EO No. 471). In 1958, local publishers formed the Philippine Educational Publishers Association (PEPA) to develop, promote, and protect the publication of Filipino textbooks. Consequently, textbook publishing experienced significant growth. It would become the most if not the only secure sector in the book industry in the Philippines.

¹⁰⁶ Cullum, 'Literary Survey – 1953', p. 51.

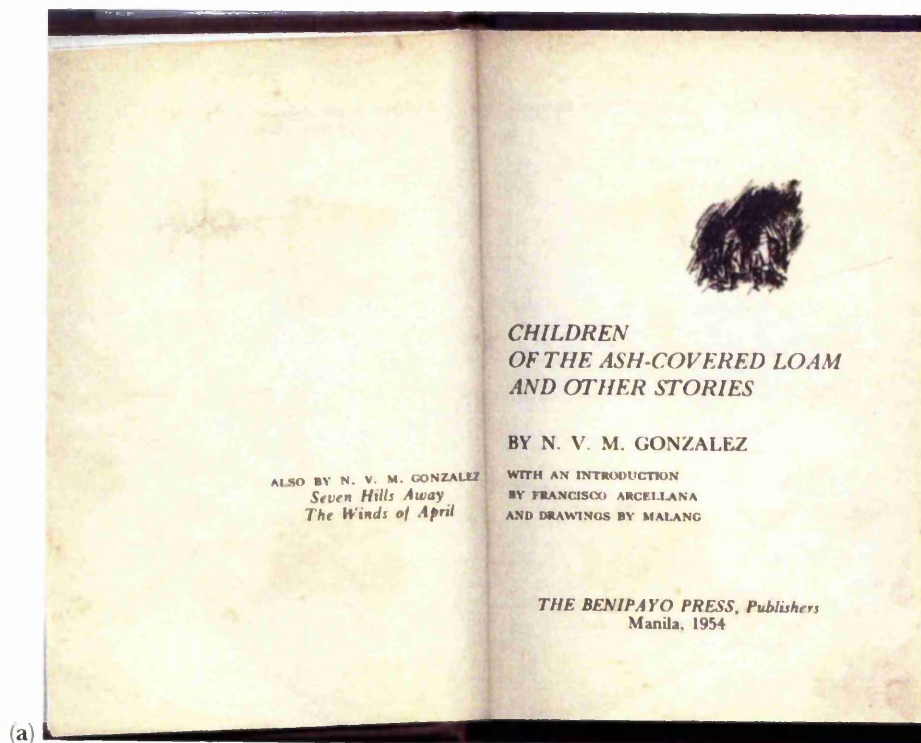
¹⁰⁷ Leo A. Cullum, 'Literary Survey – 1954', *Philippine Studies*, 3.1 (1955), 90-6 (p. 90); and 'Literary Survey – 1955', *Philippine Studies*, 4.1 (1956), 86-91 (p. 86).

While trailing far behind textbook publishing, literary publishing nevertheless gained some ground through the notable efforts of individuals who dared to go 'where professional publishers feared to tread'.¹⁰⁸ Alberto Benipayo, a printer who ran the Benipayo Press & Photo-Engraving Company, launched the Philippine Contemporary Writers series in 1954 with *Children of the Ash-Covered Loam and Other Stories*, a collection of short stories by N. V. M. Gonzalez. The series was evidently impressive in its time, at least as far as production was concerned. The Benipayo Press earned special mention in a 1956 journal review as singular in 'doing some good work' when most books were of poor quality and the use of newsprint and flamboyant yellow covers was prevalent.¹⁰⁹ The Philippine Contemporary Writers series books were typically in octavo-size, printed on book paper, and issued in cloth and paperback editions of 2000 copies each (FIGURE 9). In the 1960s, the price of the books ranged from one peso and fifty centavos (P1.50, paperbound) to four pesos and fifty centavos (P4.50, clothbound). Around eleven books—novels, short story collections, and a poetry anthology by some of the leading figures in Philippine literature in English—were published under the series, with some titles going into third and fourth print runs. The series lasted till the late 1960s.

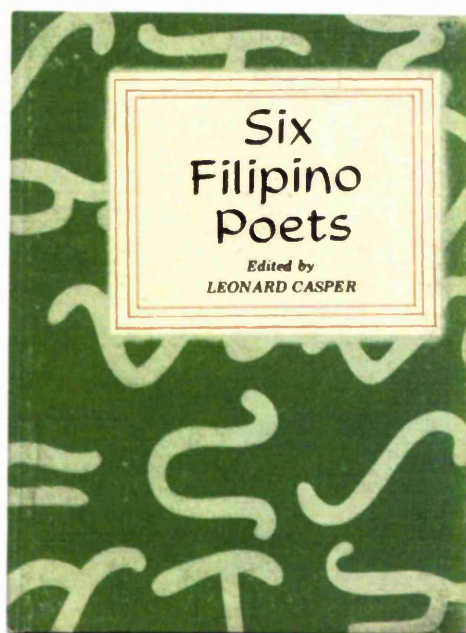
Andres Cristobal Cruz, who was a member of the *Liwayway* staff, began publishing the literary journal *Signatures* and the Filipino Signatures book series in 1960. His first Filipino Signatures title was a collection of his own verse, *Estero Poems, Songs to My Beloved and Other Songs; Sea Poems, 6 Clarius Poems*. He published around seventeen books under the series, mainly poetry in English and Tagalog (or Pilipino, as the national language was known then). The Filipino Signatures books were essentially

¹⁰⁸ Alberto Florentino, 'Komadrone to a Native Literature', *Pilipinas*, 35 (Autumn 2000), p. 8, repr. in *Pilipinas EJournal* <<http://www.uws.edu.au/social/pilipinas/florentino.pdf>> [accessed 7 February 2003].

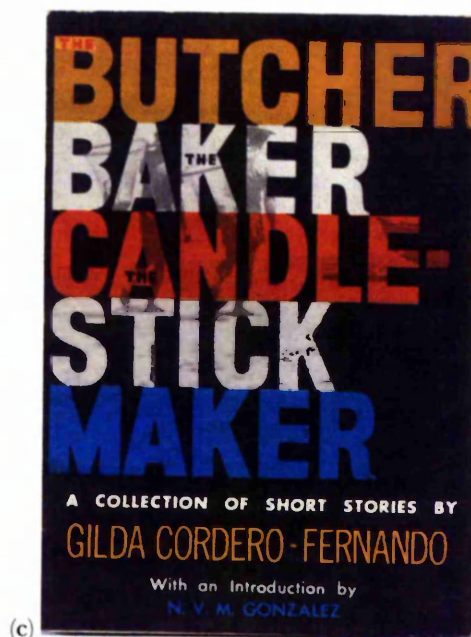
¹⁰⁹ Cullum, 'Literary Survey – 1955', p. 90.



(a)



(b)



(c)

FIGURE 9. From the Philippine Contemporary Writers series published by Alberto Benipayo: (a) title page *Children of the Ash-Covered Loam and Other Stories* by N. V. M. Gonzalez (1954), the first title in the series; (b) front cover of *Six Filipino Poets* edited by Leonard Casper (1955); (c) front cover of *The Butcher, The Baker, The Candle-Stick Maker: Thirteen Stories* by Gilda Cordero-Fernando (1962).

(Images reduced; (a) reproduced from the copy of the University of the Philippines Main Library, Filipiniana Section.)

pamphlets: stapled or stitched, ranging from around 26 to 74 pages, paperbound with cover designs of striking typography and colours (FIGURE 10). The paper used varied—from book paper, newsprint, glossy paper, to construction paper—and this perhaps had to do with whatever resources were available to Cruz at the time of publication. He was known to save paper scraps from *Liwayway* to use for his books.¹¹⁰

Alberto S. Florentino was a playwright who ventured into publishing when he had ‘a hard time placing’ his work with the Benipayo Press.¹¹¹ He issued his own collection of one-act plays *The World is an Apple and Other Prize Plays* in 1959 and thereafter went on to publish almost one hundred books by various authors. In 1962, he published *Poems 55* by Jose Garcia Villa, a Filipino writer who was making a name for himself in the US. *Poems 55*, a chapbook of 60 pages bound in paper and printed on book paper, was the first title of the Peso Books series. Florentino published around twenty other books of short stories, poems, and essays under the series, written in English by the foremost Filipino writers of the day. The Peso Books were issued in editions of 3000 copies; they were distributed by Bookmark and sold at one peso (P1.00) each. In 1973, Florentino published two other series: the Makata books of poetry (eight titles), reprints of Filipino classics in English and Tagalog, and the Storymasters books (six titles), collections of short stories in English (FIGURE 11). The books were paperbound, in perfect binding, printed on newsprint, and ranged from 96 to 130 pages. They also were sold at one peso (P1.00) initially and distributed by National Book Store. Florentino cut short his publishing activities in 1983, when he migrated to New York, but he would take on publishing projects in the Philippines intermittently in later years. On venturing into literary publishing in the 1960s, he remarks,

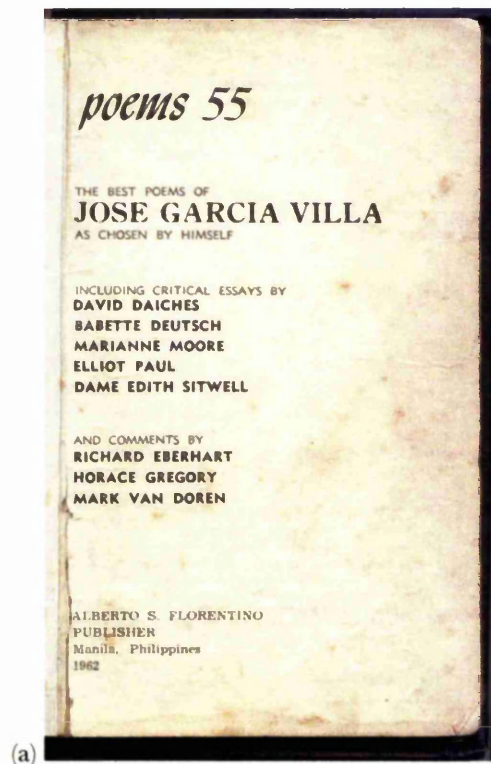
¹¹⁰ Florentino, p. 8.

¹¹¹ Florentino, p. 2.

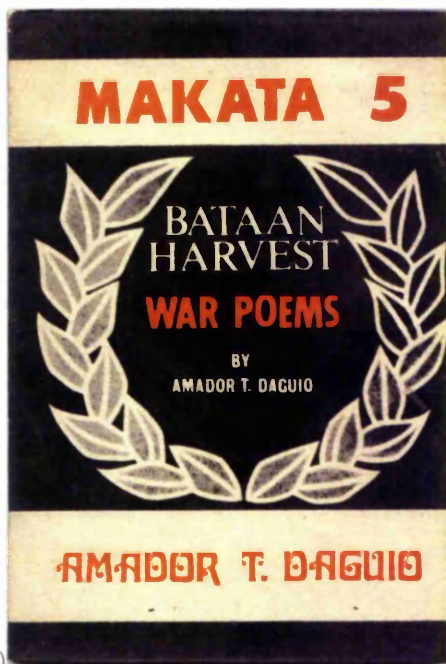


FIGURE 10. Front covers from the Filipino Signatures series published by Andres Cristobal Cruz: (a) *Estero Poems, Song to My Beloved and Other Songs; Sea Poems, 6 Clarius Poems* by Andres Cristobal Cruz (1960), (b) *Love Song and Other Poems* by Oscar de Zuñiga (1960), and (c) *Selected Poems* by Alfredo O. Cuenca Jr (1961).

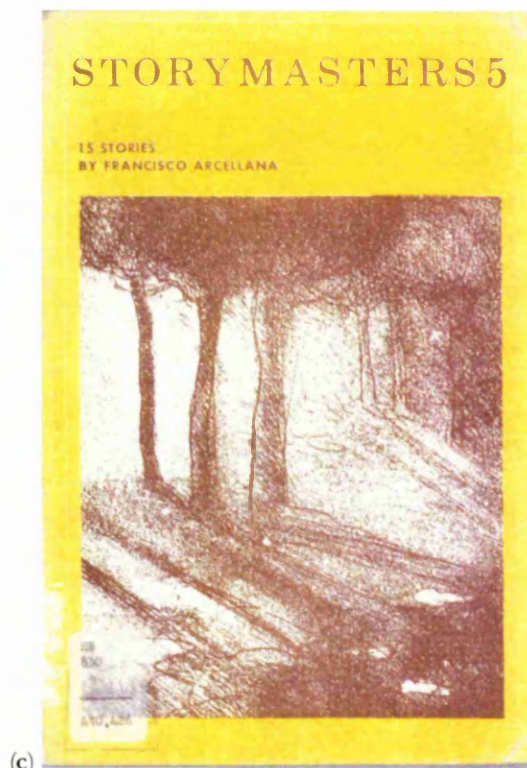
(Images reduced; reproduced from the copies of the University of the Philippines Main Library, Filipiniana Section.)



(a)



(b)



(c)

FIGURE 11. Publications by Alberto S. Florentino: (a) title page of *Poems 55* by Jose Garcia Villa (1962), the first title in the Peso Books series; (b) front cover of *Bataan Harvest: War Poems* by Amador T. Dagui (1973), fifth title in the Makata series; (c) front cover of *15 Stories* by Francisco Arcellana (1973), fifth title in the Storymasters series.

(Images reduced; reproduced from the copies of (a & b) the University of the Philippines Main Library, Filipiniana Section and (c) the School of Oriental and African Studies Library, University of London)

Among my contemporaries, writers who went into publishing with me, no one committed suicide, formally declared bankruptcy, or went to jail.... But no one became a millionaire either. They went back to their ranks and continued to write or resume their old activities.¹¹²

Among the other writers who engaged in publishing in the 1960s were the novelist F. Sionil Jose, who set up the bookshop and publishing house Solidaridad in Manila and began publishing the magazine *Solidarity* (1966-1977) and literary books, mostly his own novels, and the poet Rolando A. Carbonell, whose self-published verse and prose collection *Beyond Forgetting* (1961) under the Horizons Book House imprint sold more than 20,000 copies in several reprints but whose other publications were not as successful.¹¹³ The University of the Philippines Press (established in 1965) and the Ateneo de Manila University Press (1972) also engaged in publishing books of new and classic Philippine literature.

The publication of novels in book form progressed rather moderately, considering the auspicious beginnings of the genre in both Tagalog and English. In Tagalog, only around thirty-eight new novels (excluding translations of foreign works) were published from 1945 to 1965.¹¹⁴ The audience of the Tagalog novels could hardly afford books; however, they did spend whatever could be spared for reading material on periodicals, which were selling at twenty-five to thirty-five centavos (P0.25-0.35) a copy and being issued in large editions. The print run of *Liwayway*, for instance, was

¹¹² Florentino, p. 13.

¹¹³ Florentino, p. 13.

¹¹⁴ See *Nobelista 75: Panimulang Talaan ng mga Nobelang Tagalog 1900-1974* (Quezon City: Ang Aklatan, Unibersidad ng Pilipinas, 1974).

at around 200,000 copies per issue in the 1960s.¹¹⁵ Tagalog novels still continued to be serialised in the periodicals, but the emergence of comic books (*komiks*) gave the novel some competition in popularity and led to its transformation in form. Comic books, which began to be published in 1947, featured illustrated short stories and novels in serial form, all written in Tagalog. In the 1960s, the comic book was gaining a huge popularity; it eventually would become the favourite reading matter of the masses and would sell copies in the millions every week. As for the novel in English, it fared no better in book form than the Tagalog novel. From 1945 to 1965, a total of twenty-five new titles were issued.¹¹⁶ The publication of novels involved the difficulties of publishing literature in general: the limited market for literary books and the high cost of printing due to the reliance on imported materials and equipment. In the 1960s, paper was only beginning to be produced in the Philippines; the locally made types were inferior; and there was neither local technology nor knowledge available to produce press machinery.¹¹⁷ Novels, however, were particularly more problematic and risky investments. As a publisher observed in 1964,

Novels are rarely published here as people have to no time to read them.

Maybe the press run on a novel here will be 1,000 copies with the hopes of

selling them over two or three years. There is no best-seller concept here.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Agustin C. Fabian, 'Ilang Suliranin ng mga Sumusulat ng Kuwento at Nobela sa Wikang Tagalog', in *Sampaksaan ng mga Nobelistang Tagalog*, pp. 57-62 (p. 58).

¹¹⁶ See Majid Bin Nabi Baksh Abdul, *The Filipino Novel in English: A Critical History* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1970; repr. from *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review*, 35 (March-June 1970)). Majid lists sixty-four novels published from 1921 to 1966, including eight titles issued in the United States and sixteen published in serial form in Philippine periodicals. He notes that the output, 'exceeded only by India, is formidable when compared with the number produced in the former British colonies' (p. 3).

¹¹⁷ Luis C. Bassig quoted in John A. Lent, 'Book Publishing in the Philippines', *Unitas*, 41.2 (1968), pp. 261-75 (pp. 272-3). Bassig was publisher of the Novel Publishing Company.

¹¹⁸ Bassig quoted in Lent, p. 272.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the book publishing industry in the Philippines would remain small and not always stable, but it would nevertheless see some significant development altogether. While the output of the industry would post some sharp increases and decreases, production would generally follow an upward rather than a downward trend, as Table 1 below displays.

TABLE 1. Book production in the Philippines from the 1960s to the 1990s, with total number of titles and subtotals under the Universal Decimal Classification^a

	1960	1965	1971	1975	1982	1986	1991	1995 ^f
TOTAL NO. OF TITLES	742 ^b	941 ^c	706 ^d	2247 ^e	839	804	825	1229 ^b
Generalities	46	140	22	51	48	44	84	65
Philosophy	20	17	29	67	17	19	15	23
Religion	111	25	22	50	41	68	40	47
Social sciences	115	329	301	728	223	261	294	290
Philology	10	52	70	--	78	38	38	51
Pure sciences	19	66	27	120	59	51	27	31
Applied sciences	16	147	71	804	174	190	100	157
Arts	50	23	93	184	136	12	18	18
Literature	70	97	23	169	39	54	183	199
Geography/History	120	45	48	74	24	67	26	14
Unspecified	165	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

NOTES:

^a Since the *UNESCO Statistical Yearbooks*, from which the data in this table is derived, do not provide information on book production in the Philippines for all years from 1960 to 1999, the sample years presented are not entirely consistent. Data for the years 1961, 1981, and 1985 were not available, thus the table presents figures for the preceding or following years (1960, 1982, and 1986) instead.

^b Not including pamphlets.

^c Book and government publications only.

^d Only copyrighted publications submitted to the National Library.

^e Only publications actually received by the National Library.

^f The total number of titles for 1995 based on the subtotals actually add up to 895, but the *1999 UNESCO Statistical Yearbook* presents the total sum as 1229, which is reproduced above (p. IV-84).

SOURCES: *UNESCO Statistical Yearbooks 1963* (pp. 352-2), *1967* (pp. 390-1), *1972* (p. 718), *1976* (p. 11.2), *1985* (p. VII-48), *1988* (p. 7-42), *1999* (p. IV-84).

It must be emphasised that while the figures of UNESCO presented in the table may be considered as accurate, they should not be taken as complete accounts of book publishing in the Philippines during the years covered. The qualifications displayed in the notes above indicate this. Data from the National Library itself, which evidently served as material for the UNESCO yearbooks, cannot be regarded as thorough.

Nevertheless, the table offers a useful overview of the performance of the Philippine

book publishing industry during the second half of the twentieth century. It also presents evidence on certain features of Philippine publishing that prevailed during the time just as they had during the first half of the century. One is the dominance of textbooks in the output of the book industry. The UNESCO figures make no distinctions between textbooks and trade books, but it seems safe to assume that the items classified in the philosophy, social sciences, philology, pure sciences, applied sciences, and geography/history categories are mostly if not all textbooks. Books on these subject matters written for general audiences would begin to appear only in the 1990s and would not be produced in massive numbers anyway. Another feature that the table reveals is the minor role of literature in Philippine book publishing. Literary titles made up no more than 10 per cent of the total annual book production during the 1960s-1980s period. Only in the 1990s would their proportion increase: 22 per cent in 1991 and 16 per cent in 1995.

MARTIAL LAW UNDER MARCOS

The Philippines entered another dark phase in its history on 21 September 1972 when President Ferdinand E. Marcos declared Martial Law throughout the country. A total ban on all mass media was enforced initially. Even when publishing activity resumed, the dictatorial rule of Marcos kept a stern eye on the output of the presses. But more than censorship, the ultimate factor that hampered the development of the publishing industry was the economy. The nation was plagued by the steady inflations, the burgeoning foreign debt, and the constant depletion of the national treasury due to graft and corruption. The economic crisis bore significant effects on the structure of society: the gap between the classes was further widened and there was a steady increase in the number of Filipinos migrating overseas to seek permanent residence or contractual employment. The migration of the professionals (including

writers and artists) and skilled workers resulted in what has been called a ‘brain drain’ in the country.

As far as publishing was concerned, the government took steps towards professionalizing the industry. The existing copyright law (Act No. 3134), patterned after the US Copyright Law of 1909 and passed in 1924, was replaced by the Decree on Intellectual Property (Presidential Decree No. 49) in November 1972. The new law granted copyright to the author from the moment of the creation of a work even without prior registration and deposit with the National Library. The duration of copyright was for the lifetime of the author until fifty years after his/her death. In October 1975, the Decree on Legal and Cultural Deposit (PD No. 812) was passed, requiring all publishers to furnish the National Library and four state university libraries with copies of new publications within one month from the date of publication. The law was regarded as a much-needed effort at assembling and organising data on book publishing since no agency, whether public or private, had ever kept accurate records on the publishing activity in the country.¹¹⁹ But both laws had little effect: they were inefficiently implemented, and publishers and authors were generally indifferent to or even ignorant of them.

Two other decrees passed by the Marcos administration in 1973 (PD No. 285) and in 1977 (PD No. 1203) did make an impact on publishing in the Philippines. The government authorised the reprinting of domestic or foreign books ‘whenever the prices thereof become so exorbitant as to be detrimental to the national interest’; the 1973 decree covered educational, scientific, and cultural materials, the 1977 textbooks and reference books. These laws could well explain the dramatic increase in local book production in the mid-1970s. As Table 1 reveals, the total number of titles rose

¹¹⁹ Alfredo Navarro Salanga, ‘Publishing in the Philippines’, in *Publishing in the Third World: Knowledge and Power*, ed. by Philip G. Altbach, Amadio A. Arboleda, and S. Gopinathan (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; London: Mansell, 1985), pp. 138-51 (p. 140).

from 706 in 1971 to 2247 in 1975, with the applied sciences category displaying the most significant growth, from 71 to 804 titles. While the laws were meant to provide Filipinos with easier access to books, specifically imported titles, they had ill effects on the local publishing industry. The reprints of imported titles usually turned out to be cheaper than local books thus impeding the development of local authorship, and the laws earned Philippine publishers the reputation in international publishing circles of being pirates.¹²⁰ The laws did succeed in considerably decreasing the prices of imported textbooks, particularly for higher education; however, there still remained a scarcity of textbooks in the elementary and secondary levels. Statistics in 1976 revealed that there was one textbook for every ten students in the public schools.¹²¹ The government thus embarked on the Textbook Development Program (1976-1988) and involved itself in the publication of books, much to the dismay of the private publishers. By 1985, the government programme had produced 109 titles, with around 45 million copies distributed to the 40,000 public schools throughout the country.¹²² PEPA would claim in 1988 that most private publishers 'have been reduced to being mere printers' due to the virtual monopoly held by the government on textbook publishing.¹²³

In 1976, private publishers came together to establish the Book Development Association of the Philippines (BDAP) to raise public awareness on books and to seek government support for local publishing. In 1981, the BDAP issued a 'white paper' on the state of the book publishing industry, presenting a picture that was not all too

¹²⁰ Alfredo Navarro Salanga, 'The Publishing Scene', in *Philippine Mass Media in Perspective*, pp. 149-51 (pp. 149-50).

¹²¹ Salanga, 'Publishing in the Philippines', p. 142.

¹²² Salanga, 'Publishing in the Philippines', p. 142.

¹²³ *Educational Publishing in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Philippine Educational Publishers Association, 1988), p. 5.

bright: Printing costs were high since practically all the materials and machinery used was imported and thus subjected to 50 per cent tax. Locally published books, despite being of poor quality in general, were expensive. For some publishers, it even became more economical to have their books printed in Hong Kong then imported into the country rather than to produce them locally, which was naturally to the disadvantage of the local printing industry. Moreover, local publications faced some stiff competition from imported books, which faced only a total of 16.5 per cent in various taxes. Foreign titles flooded the market, with the ratio of imported books to locally published titles standing at around one hundred to one. In 1980, according to UNESCO figures, the importation of books and pamphlets into the Philippines was valued at \$13,726,000.¹²⁴ There are no available numbers on the trade of local books in the country to compare this importation value with, but it can well be assumed that the sales of Philippine titles generated no such stratospheric sum. Adding to the problems of publishers and the burden of consumers was the distribution of books, both local and imported, which involved high shipping and postal costs (as well as inadequate and inefficient services) and the dearth of retail outlets outside Manila. Books sold in the provinces were more expensive by 5 to 10 per cent. Around 95 per cent of book sales, other than textbooks, were made in the Metro Manila area and a few key cities of the country.¹²⁵ But the heart of the matter was the very limited market for books—disproportionately small in light of the large population and the high literacy rate of the nation. Perhaps telling of the general attitude towards reading and books is the fact that public libraries do not exist in most towns and that the

¹²⁴ 1999 *UNESCO Statistical Yearbook* (Paris and London: UNESCO Publishing and Bernan Press, 1999), p. IV-144.

¹²⁵ Book Development Association of the Philippines, 'Status Report: The Philippine Book Industry' [1981], cited in Aida Santos Maranan, 'The Book Industry in Distress', *Diliman Review*, 31 (1983), 38-44, and in Salanga, 'The Publishing Scene'. 'Metro Manila' comprises around seventeen cities (including the capital Manila) and municipalities.

bookcase is not a standard piece of furniture in Filipino homes.¹²⁶ Filipinos are not big book readers. Books are regarded mainly as a material of formal education not so much as a form of entertainment or personal enrichment. This is inextricably related to larger and more complex issues, ultimately the impoverished state of the majority of the population. In the 1980s, the cheapest book in the market cost at least a half-day's work for most workers.¹²⁷

Yet it was also around this time when a new type of publication was finding a receptive audience and a place in certain Filipino homes, reflecting only too well the vast gap in economics and sensibilities between the rich and the poor. In the 1970s, hardcover, glossy, illustrated art books began to appear in the market, led by *Contemporary Philippine Art from the Fifties to the Seventies* by Manuel A. Duldulao, published by Vera Reyes in 1972. Subsequently, other titles followed—in similar large and heavy coffee-table book format, locally produced but of imported quality, on a range of topics on Philippine history and culture, all written in English. By the 1980s, the coffee-table book had achieved a small but nonetheless fairly secure position in Philippine publishing; its emergence came as a 'minor boom in the local publishing industry'.¹²⁸ The books were published mainly by large private corporations and public institutions; some were produced by private publishers or authors themselves as one-off projects. Among the few who ventured into publishing coffee-table books

¹²⁶ Walter Robb, 'dean of American newspaper men in Manila', observed in 1934 that the 'first thing you notice about books in the Philippines is the dearth of them in Manila's pretentious homes. You are shown through a handsome house; you look in vain for books in it: there is no library, there are no books in the living room and no bedroom boasts even a small shelf of books'. In 'On the Place of Books in the Home', *The Tribune*, 20 June 1934; excerpted in 'On Books, Men, and Libraries', in *Proceedings of the First National Book Week and the 1934 Librarians' Convention* (Manila: Philippine Library Association, 1935), pp. 84-7 (p. 84).

¹²⁷ Pacifico N. Aprieto, 'Book Publishing Industry', in *Philippine Communication: An Introduction*, ed. by Crispin C. Maslog (Los Baños: Philippine Association of Communication Educators, 1988), pp. 163-77 (p. 175).

¹²⁸ Alfredo Navarro Salanga, 'Magazines, Books, and the Writer', in *Philippine Mass Media in Perspective*, pp. 165-7 (p. 166).

exclusively was the writer Gilda Cordero-Fernando, whose first title was *The Culinary Culture of the Philippines* (1976). On setting up her publishing firm GCF Books, she remarks,

... I decided long ago that there are no book buyers in the Philippines. What existed, and became our book consumers was a big, then-untapped, free-spending and well-heeled market that was buying, not books, but imported grapes and apples, desk sets, cognac, perfumes and gold ball pens – as Christmas gifts.¹²⁹

Cordero-Fernando prefers to call her publications 'illustrated books', but she acknowledges that the products of GCF Books as the rest of the coffee-table books were bought not to be read but to be given as gifts or to be displayed, 'much like a nice ashtray or a table lighter'.¹³⁰ Coffee-table books were expensive, high-end items—'invariably priced like furniture' and out of the reach of many, 'even those who could afford to have coffee tables in their living rooms'.¹³¹ The titles of GCF Books, for instance, which were issued in editions of 3000 copies, were sold at an average of three hundred and fifty pesos (P350) each. Publication was particularly risky as it involved large amounts of capital. According to Cordero-Fernando, even with her profits at an average of 25 to 35 per cent per title, 'Lesser fools would opt for the money market and sleep tight'.¹³²

¹²⁹ 'Dirty Questions to Ask a Publisher of Coffee Table Books', *Who*, 23 January 1982, pp. 34-6 (p. 35).

¹³⁰ Cordero-Fernando, p. 35.

¹³¹ Salanga, 'Magazines, Books, and the Writer', p. 166.

¹³² Cordero-Fernando, p. 36. GCF Books has persisted through the years and remains active in the publishing industry. Its most popular titles, *Turn of the Century* (1978) on late nineteenth-century Philippine society and *The History of the Burgis* (1987) on the Filipino bourgeoisie, have become important reference texts and have been reissued in paperback.

The output of the book publishing industry in the early 1980s was at around 700 titles a year, with an average print run of 3000 copies per book. Of the books produced, about 70 per cent was composed of textbooks and general reference books; 23 per cent, monographs, tracts, indices, atlases, and almanacs; 4 per cent, literary works; and 3 per cent scholarly books published by universities and research institutions.¹³³ During the decade, there were also ripples coming from what would be distinct and lively sectors in Philippine publishing in later years: children's books and romance books. While the history of Philippine writing for children can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, no publishing firm devoted exclusively to children's books existed until the establishment of Adarna House in 1980.¹³⁴ Other such ventures followed, typically producing thin, colourful, illustrated books on local folklore or of original fiction in English and Tagalog (or Filipino, as the national language was renamed), with initial print runs of 2000 to 5000 copies. On the other hand, romance books grew out of the tradition of popular writing (the metrical romances, the Tagalog novel, and the comic books) and the influence of the Western genre. The books may be considered to a certain degree as local versions of Mills & Boon romances; they were written in colloquial Tagalog or Taglish (a hybrid of Tagalog and English) and were addressed to a female audience, mainly from the lower classes. Bound in paper, printed on newsprint, and averaging around 100 pages each, the books were cheap and evidently appealing. They began appearing in the mid-1980s and steadily gained an immense popularity. Many publishing firms would be founded to feed (and feed on) the market, and romance books would achieve

¹³³ Salanga, 'Publishing in the Philippines', pp. 140-1.

¹³⁴ In Philippine writing for children, it is Rizal as well who is credited as the seminal figure. On July 1889, he published the essay 'Two Eastern Fables' in the British journal *Trubner's Record*. It was accompanied by an illustrated version of the Tagalog tale 'The Monkey and the Tortoise', which Rizal himself prepared and which is recognised today as the first Filipino story for children to be put in writing. Incidentally, it is also cited as the first Filipino comic strip, which has earned for Rizal yet another title as the 'First Filipino Cartoonist'.

phenomenal numbers in titles and sales, reaching tens of thousands in copies sold per title. The remarkable increase in the number of literary titles produced in 1991, as seen in Table 1, may be attributed in large part to the Filipino romance novel phenomenon.

Apart from the romance novel boom, however, literary publishing in general was in a precarious situation and continued to struggle in the margins. Martial Law had put an end to the existence of magazines with regular literary sections, the main channel of new Philippine writing, particularly in English. In their place came a number of government-sponsored and commercial publications, which either did not sell too well or did not look too kindly on literature.¹³⁵ There were also small magazines and literary journals, such as the English poetry journal *Caracoa* of the Philippine Literary Arts Council, but their limited circulations did not allow for much of an impact. Book publishers were all the more reluctant to invest in literature. Of the major publishers, only National Book Store was producing some significant literary publications—and only in trickles, only by authors with established reputations.¹³⁶ Literary book publishing was taken on by the authors themselves, small short-lived outfits, or minor publishing houses. New Day Publishers, a non-profit publishing firm specialising in religious books established in the early 1970s, notably produced numerous fiction and poetry books by well-known and new Filipino authors. The University of the Philippines Press also continued to publish new literature. But these efforts were, as the writer Alfredo Navarro Salanga remarks, ‘really too few and far between. And, definitely, hardly encouraging—particularly to the younger writers’.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Salanga, ‘Magazines, Books, and the Writer’, pp. 165-6.

¹³⁶ Salanga, ‘Magazines, Books, and the Writer’, pp. 166-7.

¹³⁷ Salanga, ‘Magazines, Books, and the Writer’, p. 167.

PUBLISHING AFTER THE EDSA REVOLUTION

In 1986, the Marcos dictatorship finally came to an end, overthrown by a peaceful public uprising known as the EDSA Revolution. The years that followed were marked by political unrest, economic difficulties, and natural calamities, but there was a revived sense of possibility and spirit of nationalism among Filipinos. With the renewal of freedom of the press came another flurry of activity. The major newspapers and magazines of the pre-Martial Law period resumed circulation, and new publications were launched. Book publishing, particularly the trade sector, experienced an upsurge as well although publishers continued to face the same problems that had long troubled the industry: the limited market for books, high costs and low quality of production, difficulties of distribution, concentration of the industry in Metro Manila, and lack of government support and incentives. Competition from imported titles, too, remained a pressing issue. In 1990, the importation value of books and pamphlets stood at \$14,547,000; it would rise to \$44,346,000 in 1995.¹³⁸ The imported books were mainly trade publications (fiction and non-fiction). Fewer textbooks, specifically those for higher education, were imported since they were reprinted in the country instead. Marcos's laws on the reprinting of foreign titles remained in effect, allowing Filipino publishers to continue issuing local reprints of educational materials authored by foreign writers.

In 1990, the total number of books produced in the Philippines was at around 2195 titles, around 43 per cent of which were textbooks, lagging behind the outputs of South East Asian countries with comparable population levels and economic development such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.¹³⁹ But considerable efforts were being undertaken to develop the book trade and promote books and reading in

¹³⁸ 1999 *UNESCO Statistical Yearbook*, p. IV-144.

¹³⁹ *National Book Policy* (Quezon City: National Book Development Board, 1999), pp. 7-8.

the Philippines. In 1989, the first Philippine Book Fair was held, where book publishers, distributors, and sellers came together not only to do business among themselves but more importantly to offer their products to the general public at discounted prices. It would become a popular annual event and would even branch out into other major cities outside Metro Manila. In 1990, Anvil Publishing, an affiliate of National Book Store, was established; it would become a prolific and prominent, possibly the most important, trade publisher of Philippine writing on history, sociology, and culture, including new literature. Bookmark also renewed and increased their publishing activity by producing reprints of Philippine literary classics and coffee-table books on Philippine culture and society as well as music CDs and film documentaries. Children's book publishing displayed perhaps the most vibrancy with the entry of new players into the trade; the establishment of publisher, writer, and illustrator groups; and the launching of various national programmes by government agencies and private foundations. In literary publishing, one of the most significant developments after the EDSA Revolution, and most telling of the renewed national consciousness, was the six-year project embarked upon by the presses of the premier universities Ateneo de Manila University, De La Salle University, and University of the Philippines. In 1986, the presses collaboratively launched the Panitikang Pilipino (Philippine Literature) reprint series of classic novels, short stories, poems, and plays in Tagalog and other Philippine languages (FIGURE 12). The project aimed at producing thirty-six books, ultimately 'a canon for each vernacular literature'.¹⁴⁰ It is significant to note that the material in other vernacular languages were printed with translations in Tagalog (Filipino) and not in English, which would have been the likely language of

¹⁴⁰ Esther M. Pacheco, 'The Challenge of University Press Publishing in the Third World: The Philippine Case', in *Publishing and Development in the Third World*, ed. by Philip G. Altbach (London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1992), pp. 265-86 (p. 283).



FIGURE 12. Front covers from the Panitikan Pilipino (Philippine Literature) series: (a) *Zarzuelang Iloko* edited by Mario G. R. Rosal, a collection of zarzuela plays in the original Iloko and in Tagalog (Filipino) translation published by the Ateneo de Manila University Press in 1993; (b) the Tagalog novel *Kasaysayan ng Mag-Inang Mahirap* (The Story of The Poor Mother and Daughter) by Valeriano Hernandez at Peña, De La Salle University Press, 1994; (c) *Mga Piling Awit at Korido* (Selected Awits and Corridos) in Tagalog, edited by Damiana L. Eugenio, University of the Philippines Press, 1995.

(Images reduced; reproduced from the copies of the University of the Philippines Main Library, Filipiniana Section.)

choice in the previous decades.¹⁴¹ The major and minor publishing houses also published many writers, both old and new. While the writing was still predominantly in English and Tagalog, new literary works in other Philippine languages were slowly beginning to see print. A few periodicals revived their literary sections, but the publications would become less and less interested in literature and most would cease printing literary pieces altogether. A number of small magazines and literary journals appeared, usually produced by writers themselves; most of them lasted only a few issues.

The publishing industry finally received the attention it had long sought from the government with the passing into law of the Book Publishing Industry Development Act (Republic Act No. 8047) in 1995. The law called for 'the formulation and implementation of a national book policy and a national book development plan'. It created the National Book Development Board (NBDB), which was tasked with monitoring the book industry and promoting the development of books, reading, and libraries throughout the country. Furthermore, the law granted incentives to publishers registered with the NBDB, including exemption from certain taxes. The copyright law was also updated. On 1 January 1998, the Intellectual Property Code of the Philippines (RA No. 8293) took effect, repealing the 1972 presidential decree. The term of protection remains at the lifetime of the author plus fifty years.

In the mid-1990s, with the national economy heading towards a recovery, significant ventures in bookselling were made. Leading among them was Powerbooks, established in Makati City (the financial district of the country) in 1996 by the third generation of the Ramos family, owners of National Book Store. Powerbooks was set up exclusively as a bookshop. As it did not offer school and office supplies,

¹⁴¹ Pacheco, p. 283.

traditionally the subsistence of booksellers, it was considered a bold enterprise. Powerbooks now has four branches in Metro Manila; their stock of around 42,000 titles is made up mainly of imported books. An even more daring venture was undertaken by Bookmark when it set up the Filipino Bookstore chain in the late 1990s. The shops carried not only books exclusively but Philippine books only. Other smaller bookshops, all offering mainly imported books, were established as well around Metro Manila. National Book Store also expanded their retail outlets during this period. With now over seventy branches nationwide, it remains to be the leading bookseller-stationer in the country.

The Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s put in check the growth of the book trade, even setting back some of the gains. Table 2 below provides annual book production figures during the period 1996-2003, offering a glimpse of the performance of Philippine publishing before and after the economic crisis.¹⁴² Book production, which was at 5093 titles in 1997, based on the ISBNs issued by the National Library, dropped to 4326 in 1998. There has been a slow but steady rise since then. The total number of books published in 2001 was at 5663. But print runs

TABLE 2. Book production in the Philippines 1996-2003, based on the ISBNs issued by the Philippine National Library

YEAR	TOTAL NO. OF TITLES
1996	3770
1997	5093
1998	4326
1999	4803
2000	5083
2001	5663
2002	5193
2003	5570

SOURCE: National Book Development Board

¹⁴² Data derived from 'Readership | Printed Books | Import/Export', *National Book Development Board Website*, <<http://ndbd.gov.ph/graphs.htm>> [accessed 24 January 2004].

in the trade sector remain small, typically at 1000 to 1500 copies, while new literary titles have even less at 500 to 1000 copies. The numbers are hardly sufficient for a nation with a population of around 80 million and with a literacy rate of around 94 per cent. More alarming are recent developments involving the key players in the book trade. In 2002, National Book Store issued a policy of dropping slow-selling titles from their inventory, setting the acceptable sales figure per title at a minimum of one hundred copies a month. This caused great concern among Filipino publishers and authors, for no local title—other than textbooks or exceptionally controversial books—sells that fast. Literary authors regarded the policy as a death sentence for literary publishing in the country. In 2003, Bookmark began closing its retail outlets, including the Filipino Bookstores. The company continues to maintain its book distribution and textbook publication activities, but its withdrawal from the retail market after a presence of fifty-seven years highlights the current struggles faced by the book trade in the Philippines.

In March 2003, the Social Weather Station conducted a study on the Reading Attitudes and Preferences of Filipinos, commissioned by the NBDB. It was the first study on reading and books undertaken on a national scale.¹⁴³ The results are revealing yet not surprising as they reflect perceptions and conditions that have prevailed throughout the history of the book in the Philippines—on the function of books, the frequency of reading books, the library system (or lack of) in the country, and the preferences in language. According to the study, the reading of non-school books is considered as a means of attaining information or additional knowledge by 91

¹⁴³ An earlier limited study, 'Reading Habit Among Filipinos in Selected Philippine Cities: An IPC-UNESCO Report', was conducted in 1980 by the sociologist Ricardo G. Abad of the Ateneo de Manila University.

per cent of Filipinos, whereas only 9 per cent regard it as a form of entertainment.¹⁴⁴ In 2002, 17 per cent of Filipino adults read only one non-school book, while a lesser 14 per cent read at least ten non-school books. As for the remaining 69 per cent, the report released by the NBDB makes no mention of their reading activity, but it may well be assumed that they were not exactly voracious readers. Of the non-school book readers, 76 per cent did not borrow their books from libraries. Indeed, majority of Filipinos throughout the country and from all socio-economic classes do not rely on the resources of libraries. Forty-two per cent of Filipino adults are not even aware if a public library exists in their locality. Fifty-seven per cent of Filipino adults prefer to read non-school books in Tagalog (Filipino), 30 per cent in English, and 13 per cent in Cebuano.

Perhaps the more interesting revelation of the study is on the most popular reading materials, which reflect well the character and culture of the Philippines as shaped by its history and its present struggles as a developing nation. The study cites the two leading non-school books read by Filipino adults: at 26 per cent, romance novels, the current form of popular writing offering escapist entertainment, and at 38 per cent, the ultimate book relating to Christian religion and morality—the Bible.

¹⁴⁴ 'Highlights of the 2003 Survey on the Reading Attitudes and Preferences of Filipinos', National Book Development Board, Quezon City, 2003 [unpublished report]. The study relied on a sample of 1200 respondents, 36 per cent of which was from urban areas and 64 per cent from rural areas. The representation of economic classes is as follows: Classes ABC (upper, high-middle, low-middle classes) at 7.7 per cent, Class D (high-lower class) at 67.4 per cent, and Class E (lowest class) at 24.8 per cent. Error margins are maintained at +/-3 per cent for the entire Philippines and +/-6 per cent for every study area.

CHAPTER TWO

IN SEARCH OF BESTSELLERS

Twentieth-century literary publishing in the Philippines

It is not an uncommon perception in the Philippines that there are no such things as bestsellers in local literary publishing. Considering conditions and situations that have prevailed throughout the history of the book in the country, this observation may well stand as self-evident. Publishing literature in the Philippines has traditionally been a small venture due to the limited market involved. The number of titles produced has usually been low; print-run sizes, modest; and book sales, slow. To begin with, it is not common for Philippine books, other than textbooks or exceptionally controversial titles, to sell quickly in large quantities. Local literary books do not usually get sold-out or reprinted in a matter of months; more often than not, they linger on bookshop shelves or in publishers' stockrooms for years.

Indeed, one might conclude, there are no literary bestsellers in the Philippines—that is, in the sense that the term 'bestsellers' is defined, understood, and used in the Western world. The conventional usage of the term, as John Sutherland notes, refers to 'high-profile books which sell a lot very quickly and promptly make room for other titles which will also sell a lot quickly'.¹ However, the term as simply put does not quite suffice for members of the book trade and academics involved in the study of the

¹ *Reading the Decades: Fifty Years of the Nation's Bestselling Books* (London: BBC, 2002), p. 8.

book. Its definition entails a quantification of what 'a lot' of books means (sales figures) as well as qualifications of when the book was selling quickly (week, month, year, decade), what format the book appears in (hardback or paperback), and what category it falls under (fiction or non-fiction, and its subgenres). Throughout the years, publishers and scholars have offered various definitions of what constitutes a bestseller. In the seminal study on American bestsellers published in 1947, Frank Luther Mott determined that a bestselling book must achieve a sales figure of 'one per cent of the total population of the continental United States for the decade in which the book was published'.² In the 1940s, that sales figure stood at around 1,400,000 copies.³ In 1957, the publisher Michael Joseph suggested a base limit of 50,000 sales in hardback original as the mark of a bona fide bestseller in British publishing.⁴ In 1977, in a study on American bestsellers covering the years from 1895 to 1975, Alice Payne Hackett 'arbitrarily set a figure of 750,000 copies as the requirement for listing a hardcover as a best seller and 2,000,000 as the bottom line for a paperback'.⁵ Sutherland, in a study on British bestsellers of the 1970s, established that a bestseller in the United Kingdom is a book that has achieved sales of between 20,000 to 160,000 copies in hardback and 200,000 to 1,200,000 in paperback, a fifth of the figures for the US market.⁶ Defining a 'bestseller' has been complicated further by the views of some academics who have found the term itself inaccurate. Sutherland, for

² *Golden Multitudes: The History of Best Sellers in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p.7.

³ For estimated figures of the United States population, see 'Historical National Population Estimates: July 1, 1900 to July 1, 1999', *U.S. Census Bureau*, <<http://www.census.gov/popest/archives/1990s/popclockest.txt>>.

⁴ Clive Bloom, *Bestsellers: Popular Fiction Since 1900* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 107-8.

⁵ Alice Payne Hackett and James Henry Burke, *80 Years of Best Sellers 1895-1975* (New York and London: R. R. Bowker, 1977), p. 5.

⁶ *Bestsellers: Popular Fiction of the 1970s* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 5.

instance, notes that 'bestseller' is 'something of a misnomer' as it is commonly used: 'What the fascinating weekly and annual bestseller (so-called) charts record are "fastsellers"'. To describe successful books, Sutherland uses the terms 'longsellers' (e.g., Shakespeare, the Bible, the *Oxford English Dictionary*); 'bestsellers' ('books which sell most copies in a year, year-in, year-out', such as *The Highway Code*, telephone directories, train timetables, catalogues); and 'fastsellers' (so-called bestsellers, better described by the old-fashioned term 'books of the day').⁷ The French sociologist Robert Escarpit offers similar delineations: the fast seller, which achieves very rapid high sales and then gradually drifts into oblivion; the steady seller, which starts selling slowly but evenly and has enduring popularity; and the best-seller, which starts fast and continues to maintain steady sales.⁸

Notwithstanding the varying trade and academic opinions on figures and terminology, 'bestseller' for most people has become a generic term describing a particularly popular and commercially successful publication. Above all, as Resa L. Dudovitz notes in a study on women's bestsellers in France and the US, the bestseller is a book that appears on the bestseller lists carried by newspapers or magazines.⁹ The term, in fact, traces its origin to such lists. Its first appearance, according to the *OED*, was in the 25 April 1889 issue of the *Kansas Times & Star*, which carried a list of Kansas City's six 'best sellers' of the week. However, the first bestseller list acknowledged commonly by scholars is that which appeared in the American monthly magazine *The Bookman* in 1895.¹⁰ The 'oldest systematic listing', on the other hand, is

⁷ *Reading the Decades*, pp. 7-8.

⁸ *The Book Revolution* (London: George G. Harrap, 1966), p. 116.

⁹ *The Myth of Superwoman: Women's Bestsellers in France and the United States* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 25.

¹⁰ Laura J. Miller, 'The Best-Seller List as a Marketing Tool and Historical Fiction', *Book History* 3 (2000), pp. 286-304 (p. 289).

attributed to the trade publication *Publishers Weekly*, which launched its bestseller list in 1912.¹¹

The 'bestseller' as defined by an empirical ranking based on massive and rapid sales is essentially a Western concept. The phenomenon of bestsellers reflects the corporate nature of the publishing business particularly in Northern America and Western Europe, which began to take shape in the 1960s following the mergers and take-overs of publishing houses.¹² As the publisher André Schiffrin notes of the 'corporatization' of publishing, the driving question in the industry has become 'which books will make the most money, not which ones will fulfill the publisher's traditional cultural mission'.¹³ Today, the term 'bestseller' specifically brings to mind books of fiction that have achieved phenomenal sales worldwide, whose authors have become celebrities like Stephen King or J. K. Rowling.¹⁴ While by no means representative of the publishing industry in general, fiction is the category of consumer books that is most prominent to the general public and perhaps most important to the corporate publishers. According to Clive Bloom, in a study on bestselling twentieth-century fiction in Britain, bestsellers account for only 0.008 per cent of all books published, but they could guarantee huge profits and serve as an insurance policy against failure elsewhere: 'A tiny number of authors each selling a great many books can subsidize a very large number of poorer selling titles'.¹⁵

¹¹ Dudovitz, p. 25; and Miller, p. 289.

¹² See André Schiffrin, *The Business of Books: How International Conglomerates Took Over Publishing and Changed the Way We Read* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), and Eric De Bellaigue, *British Book Publishing as a Business Since the 1960s* (London: British Library, 2004).

¹³ 'The Corporatization of Publishing', *The Nation*, 3 June 1996, pp. 29-32 (p. 29).

¹⁴ Schiffrin, for instance, refers to contemporary bestselling authors as 'the Stephen Kings of this world', in *The Business of Books*, p. 149.

¹⁵ Bloom, p. 79.

The bestseller in the Western world is a product of a complex operation with publishing practices involving author-publisher relationships mediated by literary agents, substantial advances on royalties for authors, and multi-media promotional campaigns for new titles; manufacturing procedures with editions issued in hardback and paperback, with initial print-runs in the tens to hundreds of thousands; distribution schemes with extensive and organised outlets in retail and wholesale markets; and systems of data collection for book sales and reception, such as market research (Nielsen Book Scan, BookTrack) and book reviews and bestseller lists published in various periodicals, both general (the *New York Times*, the *Times*, *The Guardian*) and specialised (*Publishers Weekly*, *Bookseller*). In the Philippines, these practices, procedures, schemes, and systems do not exist.

As the patterns and trends in the history of Philippine literary publishing would reveal, the local industry has operated in a manner and scale that does not allow for the bestseller phenomenon. However, such an overview offers an incomplete if not a skewed picture. It leaves out an important and indisputable detail: there are Filipino publications that have achieved immense popularity and remarkable commercial success. A re-viewing of the production of literary books in the Philippines—one that considers Philippine culture, literature, and society from a broader perspective and that evaluates Philippine literary publishing according to its own terms—would count in and account for such popular and successful books. It would present a more comprehensive picture of the publishing of Philippine literature. Ultimately, it would establish that the Philippines has its own bestsellers after all.

AN OVERVIEW OF PHILIPPINE LITERARY PUBLISHING

While the publishing of literature as a professional or commercial venture is largely a twentieth-century phenomenon in the Philippines, the origin of local literary

publishing may be traced back to the early seventeenth century. The first literary publications, in the form of Tagalog poetry written expressly for printing in roman letters, appeared 'not as an independent reading matter but as a handmaid to the religious publications'.¹⁶ When local literature came to be published in books of their own, beginning in the eighteenth century, the works still primarily served religious and didactic purposes. This was due to the strict censorship enforced by the Spanish authorities, the monopoly held by the Church on printing, and the intentions of the authors who were mostly members of the clergy. The literature that appeared in print was restricted to the forms of the *pasyon* (a verse narrative of the Passion of Christ), the life of the saint (in prose or verse), and the metrical romance (*awit* and *corrido*). With the emergence of private presses during the 1830s, printing became more accessible to all sorts of authors, particularly those who were not priests. But literary publishing remained limited in form and religious-didactic in nature. The only secular literature that saw print were metrical romances, numerous titles of which were issued in various vernacular languages by both religious and commercial publishers.

The publication of secular literature during the nineteenth century seems to have been a minor enterprise for publishers, a diversion perhaps from the more demanding and more profitable task of producing dictionaries, grammars, and various religious books. The physical appearance of the metrical romance books suggests that they were of no special importance: they were small and cheap productions in sextodecimo size (around 14.5 x 10 cm) with paper covers and newsprint pages. They were basically chapbooks or pamphlets. Furthermore, unlike the other trade books, the metrical romances usually did not bear the imprints of their publishers nor did they

¹⁶ Bienvenido L. Lumbera, *Tagalog Poetry 1570-1898: Tradition and Influences in its Development* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1986), p. 22. Lumbera further notes that, 'Between 1593 and 1648, twenty-four books in Tagalog came out, and whatever piece of poetry appeared in written form was found among the prefatory pages or, when it was part of the main text, appended to the catechism lessons as a means of arousing religious zeal' (p. 22).

identify their authors. Some authors used pseudonyms or indicated their initials in their verses, but most remained anonymous.¹⁷ For authors, too, the production of secular literature seems to have been a sideline venture, one that was driven less by the promise of public recognition than by the opportunity to use a God-given talent or to give glory to God. This is made evident not only by the anonymity they maintained but also by the invocations and proclamations they raised in the opening or closing lines of their metrical romances.

What is certain about nineteenth-century literary publishing in the Philippines, given the very small variety of books produced at the time, is that the profits gained from the endeavour were not very large themselves. For literary authors, publication provided no more than a supplementary income; they still had to rely on other occupations or means for their livelihood, as in the cases of Francisco Baltazar and Joaquin Tuason who were prominent writers in their day.¹⁸ Francisco Baltazar (1788-1862), better known as Balagtas, is now honoured as a poet and playwright, but he made a living in his time by holding various clerical jobs in the local government of Bataan province. Balagtas's most important work, the metrical romance *Florante at Laura* (1838), was issued in at least six editions by various publishers during his lifetime. There are no available records on how much money he received for any of these editions.¹⁹ It is known, however, that the publication of *Florante at Laura* did not make him a rich man. Neither did the other numerous poems and more than a hundred

¹⁷ Damiana L. Eugenio, *Awit and Corrido: Philippine Metrical Romances* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1987), pp. xxi-xxiii.

¹⁸ Of the few identified authors of metrical romances, only Baltazar (Balagtas) and Tuason have received the attention of Philippine scholarship. No biographical information is available on the other authors.

¹⁹ On the remuneration for the publication of *Florante at Laura*, the only information that Balagtas's biographer Hermenigildo Cruz provides is that an old printer from the Manila suburb of Sampaloc bought the copyright to publish the second and third editions of the metrical romance. *Kin Sino Ang Kumathâ Ng "Florante": Kasaysayan Ng Buhay ni Francisco Baltazar at Pag-Uulat Nang Kanyang Kanununga't Kadakilaan* (Maynila: Librería "Manila Filatélico", 1906), p. 40.

plays that he wrote. It is said that before his death, he strictly forbade any of his children from becoming poets, claiming that it would be better for them to have their hands cut off than to follow in their father's footsteps. Balagtas died in poverty.

Joaquin Tuason (1843-1908) was not so unfortunate. But he was like Balagtas in that authorship did not serve as his main source of income either. Tuason owned a wine shop, which his wife managed for him; this allowed him to devote his time to reading and writing.²⁰ He translated and adapted Spanish religious texts into Tagalog, and he also wrote essays for periodicals and various poems.²¹ Of his thirty-eight published books, twelve were metrical romances.²² Evidently he made his name through his religious titles rather than his literary pieces. His most successful work was the manual on religion and morality entitled *Matuid na landas na patuño sa langit* (The Straight Path Towards Heaven), published in 1869 and re-issued several times until the mid-twentieth century.

The ending of the Spanish colonial regime (1896) and the beginning of the American administration (1898) brought a surge of new energy and possibilities to Philippine literary publishing. During the twentieth century, in the environment that allowed for more artistic creativity and commercial activity, the publication of local literature was able to develop into an industry. But it was one that generally functioned as a secondary occupation or endeavour and rarely a primary source of income or profit for authors and publishers, just as it had for those who authored and published literature in the previous centuries. It is telling that one of the most prolific and important publishers of secular literature during the period, New Day Publishers

²⁰ 'Tuason, Joaquin', in *Dictionary of Philippine Biography*, 4 vols, by E. Arsenio Manuel (Quezon City: Filipiniana Publications, 1955-1995), I (1955), 461-8 (pp. 461-2).

²¹ 'Tuason', *DPB*, I, p. 463.

²² 'Tuason', *DPB*, I, pp. 464-7.

(founded in the early 1970s), was a non-profit firm that specialised in religious books. As the patterns and trends in author-publisher relationships, book manufacturing, book distribution, and book sales and reception during the twentieth century display, Philippine literary publishing has been largely confined to running as a small-scale business.

Authors and publishers. One of the most crucial stages in the publishing process in general is perhaps one of the least complicated in Philippine literary publishing: the negotiation between author and publisher for the publication of a manuscript. Throughout most of the twentieth century, such transactions have often been simple and informal. In the 1960s, for example, as the writer-publisher Alberto S. Florentino recalls, 'There were no publishing contracts then, only verbal agreements made over a cup of coffee or over the phone'.²³ It was only in the 1980s when written contracts started becoming a standard element in local literary publishing.

The method of paying authors, too, was straightforward for a time. In the early decades of the century, publishers practised the custom of offering authors a one-off payment in cash or in printed copies (typically one-fifth of the total print run) or in a combination of both.²⁴ The system of payment in royalties became more common beginning in the 1960s, with the rate for authors set more or less at 10 per cent. But the actual paying under this system had not been and would not be always so forthright. For example, Arturo B. Rotor, who belonged to the first generation of Filipino writers in English, received a stale cheque in the amount of twenty pesos (P20) for his short story in the *Philippine Prose and Poetry* anthology issued by the Bureau of Education (first published in 1927). As Rotor recounts, 'I wrote back, and asked them

²³ 'Komadrone to a Native Literature', *Pilipinas*, 35 (Autumn 2000), p. 8, repr. in *Pilipinas EJournal* <<http://www.uws.edu.au/social/pilipinas/florentino.pdf>> [accessed 7 February 2003].

²⁴ 'Martinez, Juan', in *DPB*, I, 275-8 (p. 277).

to please change the check. It must have been delayed in the post office. It never came back. I lost my twenty pesos'.²⁵ In this instance, Rotor at least got something (albeit a worthless piece of paper) from the publisher. With his short story collection published by Florentino in 1973 (*Selected Stories from The Wound and The Scar*, under the Storymasters series), Rotor did not receive any communication from Florentino for permission to be published nor did he receive even the promise of a single centavo for his work.²⁶ To the credit of Florentino, it must be said that he did seek the consent of some authors before publishing their works and offered them terms for remuneration. For his Peso Books series (1960s), under which around twenty titles appeared, he promised authors royalties of 10 per cent. But he admits that 'only three authors got paid'.²⁷ Florentino was not so much the rogue that he may appear to be; as he put it, he was a bootstrap publisher. It does not seem that he took advantage of authors because he hardly made money himself from his publishing efforts.²⁸ The same cannot be said, however, for some publishers who had more resources and who were more successful than Florentino. The practice of understating print runs and sales figures in order to limit or reduce the author's returns is not unheard of in Philippine publishing. But during the late decades of the twentieth century, when a sense of professionalism became more developed in the industry, the method of payment for literary works was conducted generally more honestly although not always

²⁵ 'Arturo B. Rotor', in *The Writer and His Milieu: An Oral History of First Generation Writers in English*, by Edilberto N. Alegre and Doreen G. Fernandez (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1984), pp. 181-214 (p. 201).

²⁶ 'Rotor', in *The Writer and His Milieu*, p. 201. *The Wound and The Scar*, Rotor's first collection of short stories, was originally published in 1936 by the Philippine Book Guild, an organisation set up by writers to promote Philippine writing in English. Rotor received no royalties for this book either since it was not the policy of the Guild to pay the authors they published. Rotor made his living as a physician.

²⁷ Florentino, p. 10.

²⁸ On the outcome of Florentino's 'brave attempt' to publish contemporary Philippine literature in English and Tagalog, fellow writer-publisher Gilda Cordero-Fernando says, 'Bert lost his pants'. 'Dirty Questions to Ask a Publisher of Coffee Table Books', *Who* 23 January 1982, pp. 34-6 (p. 35).

expeditiously. Authors could count on royalties of 10 to 15 per cent but had to wait at least six months to a year before receiving any money from their publishers. Needless to say, in the Philippines, there have been no deals made for spectacular advances on royalties and no literary agents to facilitate them for authors either.

At one point at least in Philippine literary publishing during the twentieth century, authors received fees that were nearly spectacular. In the early decades, according to the writer Iñigo Ed. Regalado, publishers paid authors amounts ranging from three to seven thousand pesos (P3000-7000) for Tagalog novels, depending on the length and quality of the works.²⁹ This was quite a fortune at the time, more than enough to purchase, say, a shiny new Cadillac or Buick.³⁰ But the fees for Tagalog novels soon dropped drastically. By the 1920s, due in large part to the rising popularity of the vernacular weekly magazines which regularly featured serial novels and short stories and which the public preferred to read and buy over books, authors settled for payments of only one hundred to one hundred and fifty pesos (P100-150) for the publication of their novels in book form.³¹ In the succeeding decades, the income of authors from book publishing, if they received anything at all, rose in some measure but came nowhere near the level enjoyed by the early Tagalog novelists. Late in the century, authors could earn a maximum of about fifty thousand pesos (P50,000, around £500) for a novel or for a collection of poems or of short stories.³² The amount was not enough to buy even a beat-up used car.

²⁹ *Ang Pagkaunlad ng Nobelang Tagalog* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1939), p. 17.

³⁰ According to the advertisements carried by the 4 January 1915 issue of *The Manila Times*, Cadillacs sold from four thousand and five hundred pesos (P4500) and Buicks from two thousand and six hundred (P2600).

³¹ Regalado, p. 17.

³² Jose Y. Dalisay Jr, 'Literature and Contemporary Philippine Politics', paper delivered at the 4th International Seminar on Southeast Asian Literature, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 29-30 November 2005, p. 8.

Throughout the twentieth century, many authors have taken on the task and the risk of publishing their works themselves. Some of the important early novels in Tagalog and the first novel in English (Zoiló M. Galang's *A Child of Sorrow*, issued in 1921) are among the numerous self-published efforts in Philippine literature.³³ Lope K. Santos's novel *Banaag at Sikat* (Glimmer and Radiance) provides a valuable insight on the experience of self-publishing during the early twentieth century. *Banaag at Sikat* first appeared as a serial in the Tagalog newspaper *Muling Pagsilang* (Renaissance) in 1904 and then was published as a book by Santos in 1906. While *Banaag at Sikat* is now recognised as the most prominent work of the period known as the Golden Age of the Tagalog novel (1905-1921) and a milestone in the history of Tagalog fiction for its engagement with social issues, it was a complete commercial disaster as a book.³⁴ Santos had 10,000 copies in newsprint ('papel na ekonomiko o papel-diyaryo') and 1000 in book paper ('papel na pinado') printed with the Imprenta McCollough, which cost him fifty centavos (P0.50) per copy. He sold the books in newsprint at one peso (P1.00) and in book paper at one peso and fifty centavos (P1.50) each. He managed to sell only 4000 copies. Being unable to pay for the rest of the unsold books, Santos was charged in court by the printer and ordered to relinquish various possessions, including fifteen cows, as partial payment for his printing bill. The Imprenta McCullough put up for auction the remaining 7000 copies of *Banaag at Sikat*. A Chinese merchant purchased the books and sold them at twenty centavos (P0.20) apiece. Santos spent many years paying off the rest of his debt to the printer. As he recalls, the publishing of *Banaag at Sikat* was meant to uplift his financial situation,

³³ Incidentally, the most important literary texts of the nation, Jose Rizal's novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, were self-published efforts as well.

³⁴ Resil B. Mojares, *Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel: A Generic Study of the Novel Until 1940*, 2nd edn (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press), pp. 195, 213.

instead it left him more impoverished than ever.³⁵

Not all self-publishing ventures of the twentieth century were as disastrous as Santos's *Banaag at Sikat*, but not very many were commercially successful. The most persistent of self-publishing authors is F. Sionil Jose. With money saved up from a flourishing career as a journalist, Jose established the Solidaridad bookshop and publishing house in 1965; the business operated in a building in Manila that was owned by his wife's family.³⁶ Solidaridad's publishing activity has been largely dedicated to Jose's own writings, mostly novels in English. On his expectations that publishing would allow him 'to make more money', he would later remark that he was 'very naïve'.³⁷ The publishing house became more of a financial liability than an asset.³⁸ However, despite the difficulties he faced and the debts he accumulated, Jose has managed to keep Solidaridad afloat; the bookshop and publishing house exist to this day.

Some authors shared the risks and costs of publishing their works in book form or in literary journals through the organisations they formed to promote Philippine literature; among the more prominent of these groups are the Philippine Book Guild (formed in 1936), the Philippine Writers' League (1940), and the Philippine Literary Arts Council (1980s). In the later decades of the century, there were other individual or collective efforts of publishing literary journals or magazines, but many of these publications turned out to be short-lived and unremarkable.

³⁵ Lope K. Santos, *Talambuhay ni Lope K. Santos*, ed. by Paraluman S. Aspillera (Quezon City: Capitol Publishing House, 1972), pp. 67-8.

³⁶ 'The 1980 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature and Creative Communication Arts: Biography of Francisco Sionil Jose', *Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation Online* <<http://www.rmaf.org.ph/Awardees/Biography/BiographyJoseFra.htm>> [accessed 29 May 2006]. Jose is one of the foremost Filipino writers in English; he is now a National Artist for Literature.

³⁷ Personal interview, 6 November 2004; and '1980 Ramon Magsaysay Award'.

³⁸ '1980 Ramon Magsaysay Award'.

When literary book publishing was still something of a novelty in the early years of the twentieth century, as the *Dictionary of Philippine Biography* notes, authors were more interested in seeing their manuscripts and names in print than in gaining decent profits from being published.³⁹ This attitude prevailed throughout the century. What allowed authors to think less about income from their literary writing was their full-time employment in other fields, where they made their money. Most novelists, short story writers, and poets held careers in journalism, academe, government, media, or business. Publication offered them, at best, a certain measure of personal honour or public recognition and a little extra income. They could gain prestige and profit, too, through literary contests, the most prestigious of which is the annual Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature (established in 1950).⁴⁰ Literary writing in the Philippines is known to peak a few months before the deadline of the Palanca Awards and then dry up after the awards night until the next deadline.⁴¹

For publishers themselves, there was generally not much money to be made from local literature because there was no great demand for books of fiction much less for books of poetry. Throughout the twentieth century, publishers have always been cautious about investing in literary titles. Most of the firms that persisted in doing so usually had other business interests or systems of support that could subsidize their literary publishing activities; they were printers (such as the Benipayo Press), stationer-bookseller-publisher enterprises (Bookmark, National Book Store) or affiliated with such (Anvil Publishing), or university presses (of the University of the Philippines,

³⁹ 'Martinez', *DPB*, I, p. 277.

⁴⁰ The Palanca originally offered awards only for short stories in English and Tagalog (Filipino). Its categories now include the short story, short story for children, poetry, essay, one-act play, full-length play, and futuristic fiction in English and Filipino; screenplay for television and screenplay for film in Filipino; short story in Cebuano, Hiligaynon, and Iloko; and essay in English and Filipino by children. The category of the novel in English and Filipino was introduced in the 1980s, but the entries came few and far between. The awards for the novel are now offered only once every three years.

⁴¹ Florentino, p. 9.

Ateneo de Manila University, and the De La Salle University). Or, as in the case of New Day Publishers, they were not commercial entities at all.

Book manufacturing. Filipino publishers of the twentieth century have had to contend with a basic problem that even the seventeenth-century Spanish friars encountered in the production of the early Philippine books: the high cost of printing. During the twentieth century, there were no locally made presses, and the types, paper, and ink that were produced in the country were of inferior quality. Printers and publishers thus still had to depend largely on imported machines and materials. These were costly enough, given the weaker value of the Philippine peso against foreign (Western) currencies, but they were made even more so by the exorbitant duties that came with importation. Paper, for instance, has had to be imported throughout most of the twentieth century. It was only in the 1960s when paper began to be manufactured in the Philippines. Even then, what came out of the local mills was coarse newsprint and thin whitish book paper; both types were highly acidic and did not absorb ink neatly. Paper of better quality and variety still had to come from overseas. On the importation of 'world-class' book paper, Karina A. Bolasco of Anvil Publishing noted in 2002 that the material 'is taxed heavily and paperwork/procedural requirements attendant to its importation are too tedious and lengthy. At a time when the world price of bookpaper [*sic*] was \$650 per ton, it was being sold to local publishers at \$1,125 per ton after taxes'.⁴²

The high cost of printing could well explain why Philippine literary books of the twentieth century looked the way they did. They were austere productions in general. The small print-run sizes of literary titles—from 2000 to 15,000 copies per edition in

⁴² 'Emerging Trends in Philippine Publishing', paper delivered at Booklatan sa Bayan: Roundtable Discussions on Current and Emerging Trends in Book Publishing, Roxas City, Philippines, 6 November 2002.

the 1900s; 1000 to 3000 in the 1960s; and 500 to 1000 in the 1990s—did not offer publishers very cheap prices for the manufacturing of their books, given that printing works on an economy of scale. Publishers evidently scrimped on the other aspects of book manufacturing to make their titles affordable in the market. During the early decades of the period, the literary books were typically printed in newsprint and bound in paper (either glossy book paper or newsprint) with the gatherings stitched or stapled; they were usually in octavo size (around 18 x 13 cm). For some titles, a small run in book paper was produced to complement the edition and released simultaneously with the larger run in newsprint, but this was not a standard practice. Hardback literary titles began to appear only in the 1950s. Books in this format, too, were a part of an edition that was mainly issued in paperback. However, not very many publishers made the effort and took on the expense to produce these extra runs in hardback. It seems that only those who did so were the Benipayo Press (in the 1950s and 1960s), National Book Store (at least for one title in the 1980s) and the University of Philippines Press and the Ateneo de Manila University Press for their earlier literary titles (in the 1960s to the 1980s for the former, in the 1970s to the 1980s for the latter). Hardback binding is not common in Philippine publishing in general because it is extremely expensive and thus usually used only for coffee-table books or vanity publications of giant corporations or wealthy individuals. For the most part of the second half of the twentieth century, publishers issued their literary titles only in paperback editions, in perfect binding. The books generally had glossy or laminated paperboards as covers and pages in book paper. Newsprint pages were still used for cheaper productions, such as Florentino's various series or some Tagalog novels or reprints of Philippine classics marketed as textbooks. The sizes of the books

ranged from around 18 x 12 cm to around 22 x 14 cm (the standard size of trade books by the 1980s).

Book distribution. Adding to the expenses and problems of Filipino publishers is the distribution of books, a matter not made simple by the archipelagic nature of Philippine geography. Transporting books from Metro Manila, the centre of local publishing activity (and practically all affairs of the nation), to other cities and towns in the provinces has always involved not only high costs for postage and freight services but also the risk of damage or loss due to inefficient (or incompetent) delivery.⁴³ Not many publishers could afford such costs or risks. Thus during the twentieth century, and indeed even in the prior centuries, the local book trade was concentrated in Manila. In the 1970s, for instance, around 95 per cent of trade book sales were made in the metropolitan centre; books that found their way to the provinces sold generally at higher costs, from 5 to 10 per cent more than Manila prices.⁴⁴

Book distribution in the Philippines has been made more problematic by the inadequacy of retail outlets. In 1948, for example, when the population of the country was at around eleven million, there were only 177 bookshops/stationers/magazine dealers nationwide, as listed by the national census; 124 of such establishments were located in Manila.⁴⁵ In 1995, according to a study undertaken by Anvil Publishing, the total number of bookshops stood at around 2000, with 558 located in Metro

⁴³ Bolasco, 'Emerging Trends'. 'Metro Manila' refers to the aggregation of thirteen cities (including the capital city of Manila) and four municipalities; it is also known officially as the National Capital Region.

⁴⁴ Book Development Association of the Philippines, 'Status Report: The Philippine Book Industry' [1981], cited in Aida Santos Maranan, 'The Book Industry in Distress', *Diliman Review*, 31 (1983), 38-44 (p. 40).

⁴⁵ *Census of the Philippines 1948*, 4 vols (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1953), IV: *Economic Census Report*, p. 571.

Manila (National Capital Region).⁴⁶ The other regions had an average of around eighty-six bookshops each. In Mindanao, an area in the southern Philippines that has long suffered underdevelopment, the situation was dismal: Regions 9 (Zamboanga) and 12 (Cotabato), each with a population of around four million, had only twenty-four and twenty bookshops, respectively. Bolasco sums up the state of affairs thus:

At 2000 [bookshops] for all of 68 million Filipinos, that's about one bookstore for every 34,000 people, not that there are 34,000 people wanting to rush to one bookstore. Beer dealers are 270,000 [in number] all over the country.... This means one beer outlet per 250 people, and you can be sure there are more than 250 people wanting to rush to one beer dealer. It's just not the same craving, although both cravings are known to coexist in writers.⁴⁷

For publishers of Philippine literature during the twentieth century, the problem of retail outlets bore an added dimension. Local literary books had limited access to (and in) these channels of distribution. In the early decades of the period, the large bookshops were located mainly in downtown Manila; they usually carried imported books and magazines only. Local literary titles were sold through small bookshops outside the downtown; vendors in markets, sidewalks, or outside churches; and peddlers who travelled to the towns and cities of the neighbouring provinces. Some authors also sold their own books themselves. Retail conditions for local literary books improved significantly by the 1970s, but it was still hardly ideal for authors and publishers. While the prominent bookshops of the day already carried local trade titles, the books were all lumped together regardless of category in the 'Filipiniana' section. As the writer-publisher Gilda Cordero-Fernando deplored the situation in

⁴⁶ Bolasco, 'Emerging Trends'.

⁴⁷ 'Publishing and Writers', paper delivered at Authors'/Writers' Forum, University of the East Foundation for Research and Advanced Studies, Manila, 27 June 2000, p. 1.

1982, 'our Philippine books occupy one tiny bookshelf picaresquely called *Filipiniana* in a large bookstore swimming in imported books, in our own country, when it is foreign books that should be called "Americana," "Britannica" etc'.⁴⁸ At that time, the ratio of imported titles to locally published books in the market was estimated at one hundred to one.⁴⁹ In the 1990s, the bookshop for local publishers was still, as Bolasco put it, a 'battlefront—a territory dominated by imported books'.⁵⁰ To this day, while local trade books occupy more than one shelf in bookshops and are organised according to their categories, they are still displayed separately from imported titles. For Filipino literary authors, the writer and academic Jose Y. Dalisay Jr maintains that, 'our rivals on the bookshelves are not each other, but Tom Clancy, Danielle Steele, John Grisham, and, yes, J. K. Rowling'.⁵¹

The other channel of book distribution, the library system, has not served as a very significant outlet for Philippine literary books. This has to do with the fact that, like bookshops, libraries in the Philippines have been traditionally low in number, appallingly so in proportion to the population of the country. In the 1930s, for example, when the population was at around fifteen million, the estimated number of public libraries was no more than seventy-five.⁵² A larger library system existed, though, in the schools and universities (in 1932, there were 4947 libraries in the public schools), but needless to say, access to these facilities served educational purposes and was restricted to students and faculty.⁵³ While the public library system saw some

⁴⁸ 'Dirty Questions', p. 36.

⁴⁹ Book Development Association of the Philippines, 'Status Report', cited in Maranan, p. 39.

⁵⁰ "Emerging Trends".

⁵¹ p. 9.

⁵² Joseph Ralston Hayden, *The Philippines: A Study in National Development* (New York: Macmillan, 1942; repr. 1950), p. 613.

growth in the succeeding decades, there still remained a shortage of libraries for the rapidly increasing Philippine population. In 1999, there were 545 public libraries in the country; the population was well over seventy million.⁵⁴ The lack of libraries in the Philippines has not allowed for such institutions to play a part in the life of towns and cities. Or perhaps it is just well to say that the life in towns and cities did not allow a part for libraries. Filipinos generally associate libraries with formal education, as institutions where students and scholars go to further their learning rather than as centres where any person can visit to gain some enlightenment and recreation. Filipinos are more likely to make a mad dash for a bookshop than a sober rush to a library.

Book sales and reception. There is a long-held notion in the Philippines that the only people who read local literary books are the same people who write them. This cannot be said to be entirely true (surely the families and friends of authors read their works too). What can be claimed without doubt, however, is that the readership of Filipino literary books is not at all very wide. It is limited to a small circle that usually includes authors themselves indeed but also scholars, critics, and students. There is no general public or mass audience to speak of in the matter of the readership of Philippine literature, as indicated not only by the small print-run sizes of the books but also their low and slow sales. The early Tagalog novels, for instance, sold poorly. According to the novelist Faustino Aguilar, many copies ended up as wrapping paper in Chinese shops, as commodities in junk shops, and as bargain items sold by

⁵³ Vicente S. Hernández, 'Trends in Philippine Library History', paper delivered at the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions 65th Council and General Conference, Bangkok, Thailand, 20-28 August 1999, repr. in *IFLANET: International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions Website*, <<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla65/papers/039-138e.htm>> [accessed 2 June 2006]. For an account on the history of libraries in the Philippines, see also Hernández's *History of Books and Libraries in the Philippines 1521-1900* (Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 1996).

⁵⁴ Hernández, 'Trends in Philippine Library History'.

publishers to clear their stockrooms.⁵⁵ From 1903 to 1938, there were 328 Tagalog novels published in book form; only twelve of these titles saw reprinting.⁵⁶ In the 1960s, literary publishers issued editions in the hope that it would sell out in two or three years.⁵⁷ But this expectation was not always fulfilled. Some copies of the books, in fact, would remain unsold for decades. For example, at the 24th Manila International Book Fair held in 2003, the booth of the bookseller-souvenir shop Tradewinds carried literary titles published during the 1960s. The books were essentially brand new although their pages had already yellowed with age; they were sold at twenty pesos each (P20) under a five-for-P100 'special' offer. In the later decades of the twentieth century, it was no longer such a rare occurrence for the edition of a literary book to sell out. There were even some remarkable cases: 4600 copies of the Philippine edition of Ninotchka Rosca's novel *State of War* (published by National Book Store in 1988; originally published by W. W. Norton) sold out in two years; 1000 copies of Dalisay's collection of short fiction *Penmanship and Other Stories* (Anvil, 1995) sold out in one month; and 500 copies of Mike Bigornia's poetry collection *Prosang Itim* (Black Prose; Anvil, 1996) sold out in three months.⁵⁸ But, as Bolasco supposes, these cases were 'flukes'; the editions of literary books generally still took at least two years to sell out.⁵⁹

One factor that undoubtedly affected the performance of Philippine literary titles in the market was the price of the books. This, too, could explain why the readership of local literature was so limited. Throughout most of the twentieth century, a local

⁵⁵ *Ang Nobelang Tagalog: Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1949), p. 7.

⁵⁶ See 'Talaan ng Mga Nobelang Tagalog', in Regalado, pp. 30-46.

⁵⁷ Luis C. Bassig, publisher of the Novel Publishing Company, quoted in John A. Lent, 'Book Publishing in the Philippines', *Unitas*, 41.2 (1968), pp. 261-75 (pp. 272-3).

⁵⁸ Bolasco, 'Publishing and Writers', p. 10.

⁵⁹ 'Publishing and Writers', p. 10.

literary book typically cost more than the minimum daily wage, or what the average Filipino earned in a day.

During the twentieth century, literary books in the Philippines were sold quietly, with hardly any fanfare. It was not the custom of publishers to host book launching events; to advertise their new titles in newspapers or magazines; or to arrange deals with booksellers for the prominent positioning or special display of their books. The release of a new title became known basically by word of mouth. There were no commercial or celebrity book clubs to endorse specific titles and ensure massive sales. Reviews of local literary books appeared occasionally if not rarely; they were written typically by newspaper columnists. Bestseller lists never appeared at all because no systematic monitoring of the book trade existed. One might well say, too, that there were no bestsellers to list anyway.

RE-VIEWING PHILIPPINE LITERARY PUBLISHING

There is something puzzling or mysterious even about Philippine literary publishing. Consider the situation during 1995 for instance: the Philippine population was at around seventy million; the literacy rate was at 94.5 per cent; 199 literary books were published, each with print runs ranging from 500 to 1000 copies.⁶⁰ The numbers do not quite add up. Why were there so few books produced in such small quantities when there was a massive number of people who evidently could read? One could take into account two significant cultural and social factors to make better sense of the situation. First, reading books is not a common pastime in the Philippines since the habit is not so ingrained in local culture. In public transport, for example, Filipinos are likely to chat with each other, eat a snack, or take a nap; they might read

⁶⁰ *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 1999* (Bangkok, Thailand: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2000), p. 438; and *1999 UNESCO Statistical Yearbook* (Paris and London: UNESCO Publishing and Bernan Press, 1999), pp. II-48, IV-84.

a newspaper, tabloid, or magazine, but in all probability they would not even so much as browse through a book. Second, the Filipinos who are more inclined to read books as a habit or a pastime and who can afford to regularly buy books (and who, incidentally, are not likely to use public transport) typically belong to the smaller sector of Philippine society, the upper and higher-middle classes which count for just a little over 1 per cent of the population. But it is also this sector that is the most attuned to and perhaps most enamoured with Western culture; thus, its members tend to buy and read imported books rather than local titles. Still, even with these factors in mind, there is much left unexplained about Philippine literary publishing or more precisely the reading of local literature in the Philippines. With the 1995 figures, the best case scenario plays out as such: 199 titles with print runs of 1000 copies each would amount to 199,000 books in all; supposing that there are three readers per book (a most optimistic count), that total of 199,000 books then would have 597,000 readers. This number of people does not make up even 1 per cent of the Philippine population at that time. And, considering that the prices of local literary books were not exactly inexpensive, it might be assumed that these readers were from the higher classes of society. But what about the lower classes then, the Filipino masses that made up nearly 99 per cent of the population? Did they not read local literary books at all? Were there no local literary books at all for them to read?

The answers to these questions would not be so obvious or simple, perhaps these questions would not even come up at all, if one were to look more closely at Philippine literary publishing and focus not on all sorts of numbers but on one crucial basic concept: literature in the context of Philippine culture and society. One must actually look beneath the conception of such as maintained and propagated by the local literary establishment during the twentieth century. One might then find something

not so puzzling or mysterious about Philippine literary publishing but rather something quite surprising.

In the Philippines, during most of the twentieth century, literature was primarily defined by what language was used in writing rather than how that language was used. What counted as literature were the writings in English; the writings in the vernacular languages generally did not count at all. This notion arose in the 1930s when Filipino writers became more proficient and prolific in producing works in English; it became a common belief thereafter. The guardians of this concept of literature were scholars, critics, and authors who formed the literary establishment in the Philippines. They belonged to the new elite, a sector that came from the upper and middle classes of society and that was fostered in large part by the educational system established by the American administration. Indoctrinated in American culture, the Filipino elite readily adopted the language, standards, and values of their colonizers. For the authors from this set, English became the ultimate medium of expression and acceptance into the ranks of American literature, the ultimate goal.⁶¹ The vernacular languages clearly did not suit their purposes and desires. The authors, as did the rest of the literary establishment, found the local languages pedestrian to begin with, unworthy of high literary achievement.⁶² Consequently, they ignored, dismissed, or condemned the writings that were not in English despite the fact that the literary activity in the vernacular languages was much livelier than in English; or that there were more works produced in Tagalog than all of that in English, Spanish, and other vernacular languages put together; or that the writings in Tagalog appealed to large audiences throughout the country. The Palanca Awards, ever since their inception in 1950, acknowledged the legitimacy of Tagalog literary writing by

⁶¹ Dalisay, p. 4.

⁶² Dalisay, p. 4.

including a Tagalog division along with the English division in their annual contests. However, this seems to have borne little significance for the literary establishment. As far as they were concerned, fiction and poetry in Tagalog or in other vernacular languages were just these writings that appeared regularly in the cheap weekly magazines and occasionally in book form; the Filipino masses read and enjoyed these works because they just did not know any better. As for the authors of these writings, the literary establishment thought that they should have known better. These authors, like those who wrote in English, belonged mostly to the middle class. But because they used the vernacular languages, they were regarded by the authors in English as 'poor relations' or 'kin of no consequence'.⁶³

The view held by the literary establishment was a manifestation of a situation that has long prevailed in Philippine society and the assumptions that have been inextricably tied to it: the 'great divide' between the Filipino elite and the Filipino masses, with the former possessing intelligent, informed, and refined taste, and the latter lacking all such sensibility. Intrinsic in this divide is the 'colonial mentality' that is so deeply rooted in Filipino society; it is an all-encompassing mindset that deems things Western (American specifically) or overtly Western-influenced at least as naturally superior, sophisticated, or modern and things Filipino as inferior, crude, or primitive. In this frame of mind, everything imported from the West or bearing a semblance of being such was considered as 'high class' and anything local was 'low class' or '*pang-masa*' (for the masses) or '*bakya*' (a reference to the cheap wooden sandals typically worn by ordinary people). '*Bakya*' is a particularly interesting term, and it captures precisely how the literary establishment regarded writings in Tagalog and the

⁶³ Bienvenido Lumbera, 'Philippine Literature and the Filipino Personality', in *Brown Heritage: Essays on Philippine Cultural Tradition and Literature*, ed. by Antonio G. Manuud (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1967), pp. 1-15 (pp. 3, 15).

other vernacular languages. The term was first used as an adjective in the early 1960s by the maverick filmmaker, now National Artist, Lamberto V. Avellana to designate the masses. He described this sector of the Philippine population as the ‘*bakya* crowd’, the anti-thesis of the well-heeled elite. The *bakya* crowd, according to Avellana, made up the kind of audience that his serious films were explicitly not meant for.⁶⁴ ‘*Bakya*’ in adjective form has become part of the Philippine vocabulary and has remained no less derogatory since Avellana coined it. The term, as the writer Jose F. Lacaba notes, has come to refer to ‘anything that is cheap, gauche, naïve, provincial, and terribly popular’.⁶⁵

Perhaps the writings in the vernacular languages may be described as indeed cheap, gauche, naïve, and provincial, as indeed of poorer quality than the writings in English. Tagalog fiction, for instance, as some of its authors and scholars themselves admit, lagged behind in development. As the scholar of Tagalog literature Bienvenido Lumbera remarked in the late 1960s, ‘Much as the prejudice [against works in the vernacular languages] should be deplored, ...there is some truth to the generalization that Tagalog writing as a whole is inferior to Filipino writing in English’.⁶⁶ Lumbera observed that the Tagalog novels and short stories lacked the linguistic artistry, thematic complexity, and fullness in characterisation displayed by fiction in English. He noted that the Palanca award-winning stories in Tagalog during the first five years of the contest (1950-1955) would probably have been discarded by the judges had they been written in English.⁶⁷ However, it cannot be claimed in absolute terms that the

⁶⁴ Vicente L. Rafael, ‘Taglish, or the Phantom Power of the Lingua Franca’, in *White Love: and Other Events in Filipino History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), pp. 162-89 (p. 171).

⁶⁵ Quoted in Rafael, p. 171.

⁶⁶ ‘Philippine Literature and the Filipino Personality’, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁷ ‘Philippine Literature and the Filipino Personality’, pp. 7-8.

Tagalog writers were incapable of producing works of high literary quality. There were in fact Tagalog novels and short stories that did exhibit skilful handling of literary elements, but these works were in fact, too, not the run of the mill. What the Tagalog writers churned out in general was fiction that used stilted language, trite themes, and stereotypical characters. This had to do with the main outlet of Tagalog writing (and the other vernacular languages as well), which was the weekly magazines. As market-driven ventures, the magazines published the kind of fiction that appealed to their audience; that audience was the Filipino masses and what they wanted to read were basically moralistic melodramas. Tagalog writers then had to submit to the formula prescribed by the magazines if they wanted to see their works in print; in other words, they had to cater to the *bakya* crowd of lesser taste. Filipino writers in English, on the other hand, did not depend on mass audiences for the dissemination or survival of their works. The writings were not intended for the masses in the first place, for it was only the elite who had a genuine command of English, which they were able to acquire because they had access to better and higher education. Filipino writings in English appeared in the English newspapers and magazines, and as books that circulated mainly within the small circle of the literary establishment.

What can be decidedly said about the writings in Tagalog and the other vernacular languages is that they were indeed terribly popular among large audiences throughout the country. The literary establishment could not keep ignoring, dismissing, or condemning these writings completely and perpetually. In the late 1960s, when nationalist and socialist sentiments were astir in Philippine society (which would escalate in the 1970s, during the Martial Law years), a shifting in attitudes towards local languages and cultures began to take place. While the literary establishment still largely regarded works in the vernacular languages as *bakya*, they at

least came to grant the writings some legitimacy by designating them as 'popular literature'. It was not a grand concession altogether, for the category was assigned the lesser, marginalised position in Philippine literature. The greater, dominant category was 'serious literature', which mainly consisted of works in English. The Philippine literary landscape may have changed during the later decades of the twentieth century, with the acknowledgement of the validity of writings in the vernacular languages, but the notions and prejudices of the past remained: the writings in English counted as serious literature while the writings in Tagalog and the other vernacular languages, as popular literature. The literary establishment continued to view popular literature in the manner described by Northrop Frye: as 'literature designed only to entertain or amuse, which is out of sight of truth, and should be avoided altogether by serious people' because 'reading it is a waste of time'.⁶⁸ Interestingly, much of the serious literature of the Philippines is actually serious in the literal sense, marked by a 'crushing humorlessness' as described by Dalisay. Remarking further on 'this strange feature' of Philippine literature that is 'so far removed' from the everyday realities of Filipinos, Dalisay says,

We are a laughing, smiling people; we laugh even in the worst of times and the most perilous of moments as a nervous reaction and as a coping mechanism.... But when we write novels, it's as if we were confessing to a priest or preaching from the pulpit instead of confiding in one another; our words suddenly acquire a numbing solemnity, a high seriousness that may yet be Jose Rizal's most enduring and yet also most paralyzing legacy to his successors.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 21, 23.

⁶⁹ p. 12.

While the works that were classified as popular literature are not entirely comic or realistic, they generally bear none of the gravity and self-importance or involvement that the serious literary writings do. Philippine popular literature, in large part, was indeed designed to entertain and amuse. Perhaps the Filipino masses responded so enthusiastically to the frivolous and sensationalistic words of such writings because for these people who lived mostly in poverty, everyday reality involved more than enough solemn and serious matters.

In spite of how they were regarded or disregarded by the literary establishment, the writings in the vernacular languages were the works that were read by the Filipino masses; they were the works that served as literature for the majority of the Philippine population. If one were to recognise this fact, then one would find that the most commercially successful types of literary publications in the Philippines during the twentieth century come from the body of writings in the vernacular languages. A careful examination of the publishing of these kinds of books would reveal that they were not flukes. They evidently followed a consistent pattern, wherein one type becomes the most popular at a particular point in time and then falls out of fashion as another type emerges in its place as the favourite for another period. Furthermore, the production of these literary publications seems to have involved less strokes of luck than clever strategies, which were pursued by authors and publishers who were well attuned to the demands of the mass market. The most popular and most successful types of literary books were all written in Tagalog, the leading vernacular language; they all offered cheap, formulaic, and escapist entertainment. They are the metrical romances published from the 1900s to the 1920s, novels from the 1920s to the 1940s, comic books from the 1950s to the 1980s, and romance novels from 1985 to 2000. The reaction of the literary establishment towards these publications is not surprising:

they were condemned and dismissed as ‘exaggerated, puerile, and absurd’ (in the case of the metrical romances), as ‘ephemeral little efforts’ (Tagalog novels), as ‘the lowest form of consciousness, the worst form of taste’ (comic books), and as ‘Tagalog trash’ (romance novels).⁷⁰ Some of the publications were not considered as books or even as reading matter, so they do not all register in the available records on Philippine literary publishing. All these publications, however, generated a response from the general public that is rather startling. The books—which were produced in large editions, with print runs ranging from 10,000 to over 100,000 copies—sold out very quickly, within one week at a minimum or one year at a maximum. If one were to regard Philippine literary publishing in its own light rather than in the shadow of publishing in the Western world, as the literary establishment has tended to do, then one would see that these numbers are not at all insignificant. Compared to that of ‘legitimate’ or ‘serious’ Philippine literature, they are quite astonishing. Finally, if one were to consider the term ‘bestseller’ as it is theoretically defined and apply it to the Philippine setting, then one would discover that there are indeed bestsellers in the Philippines. Bloom offers the following definition: a book ‘sold in the most units to the most people over a set period of time’.⁷¹ The books that have achieved such a distinction are the Tagalog metrical romances, novels, comic books, and romance novels; they are the literary bestsellers of the Philippines.

⁷⁰ Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera, ‘The Heritage of Ignorance’, in *Thinking for Ourselves: A Collection of Representative Filipino Essays*, 2nd edn, ed. by Eliseo Quirino and Vicente M. Hilario (Manila: Oriental Commercial, 1928), pp. 1-17 (p. 5); Leo A. Cullum, ‘Literary Survey – 1955’, *Philippine Studies*, 4.1 (March 1956), 86-91 (p. 87); Sylvia L. Mayuga, ‘From Kenkoy to Tisoy: Komiks and the Filipino Consciousness’, *Sunburst*, April 1976, pp. 14-21, repr. in *Philippine Comic Magazine: Kalabog, Kenkoy, Phantomanok, Etc.*, comp. by M. Georgette C. Solina (Quezon City: Institute of Mass Communication, University of the Philippines, 1980), pp. 25-41 (p. 34); and Benjamin Ocampo, e-mail message to author, 20 February 2006.

⁷¹ Bloom, p. 6.

STUDYING BESTSELLERS AND PHILIPPINE BOOK HISTORY

Bestsellers serve as a fascinating and useful subject of study. As cultural objects and commercial products, the books provide a perspective on the currents and conditions in culture and society as well as in the politics and the economy of their time. As exceptionally popular and successful books, the bestsellers offer a unique insight on the workings of the book trade (the modes and methods of producing literature) and on the nature of the reading public (their interests, issues, and needs) during the period when they thrived.⁷² In this respect, they may have more to tell than the other books of their day.

In Philippine scholarship, not very many studies have been undertaken on literary publishing. On bestsellers, practically none has been done. It seems necessary if not imperative to address this lack and to fill a gap in the discipline of Philippine Studies. The study of bestsellers offers a wide angle from which one can examine not only Philippine literary publishing history in particular but also the history of the Philippine book in general. As it inevitably involves acknowledging the choices and tastes in reading of the general public, the Filipino masses, the study of Philippine bestsellers presents a view of literary, cultural, and social history that need not be limited upward (from the perspective of the elite) or outward (according to the standards of the West), as much of traditional Philippine scholarship has tended to offer.

The literary bestsellers of the Philippines during the twentieth century were the writings that the local literary establishment particularly ignored, dismissed, or condemned. They were written in Tagalog, in the forms of the metrical romance, the novel, the comic book, and the romance novel. They provided cheap, formulaic, and escapist entertainment. They achieved immense popularity and remarkable

⁷² Bloom, pp. 4-5; and Sutherland, *Bestsellers*, p. 5.

commercial success in their day. An earnest study of the history of the book in the Philippines would be remiss—and would not be earnest at all—if it were to ignore, dismiss, or condemn further these publications.

CHAPTER THREE

A NEW DEMAND FOR OLD TEXTS

Philippine metrical romances in the early twentieth century

One of the most distinct if not disconcerting characteristics of the metrical romances of the Philippines is anachronism. Inconsistencies or errors in time and place are so common in the verse narratives that they are practically a convention of the genre in Philippine poetry. Filipino authors evidently took great liberties in presenting foreign characters, fantastic plots, and 'exotic' settings due possibly to extravagant imaginations or perhaps to the sense that sophisticated poetry necessarily involves a certain flamboyance or more likely to limitations in knowledge of the larger world outside the Philippine archipelago. As Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera describes the romances:

Not only are they ignorant of, and do they falsify, the face of the earth, but the planetary system itself suffers a radical change. Palms and tamarind trees grow in the vicinity of Moscow; Palestine and Macedonia are covered with prairies like Norway and Switzerland; and whales appear in the Mediterranean. Events which begin in the morning in Macedonia end in the most natural manner in the afternoon of the same day in a place in Babylonia; and a princess of Aragon, captured early in the morning in Sicily, converses at midnight and without an interpreter with a Moro of Samarcand.¹

¹ 'The Heritage of Ignorance', in *Thinking for Ourselves: A Collection of Representative Filipino Essays*, 2nd edn, ed. by Eliseo Quirino and Vicente M. Hilario (Manila: Oriental Commercial, 1928), pp. 1-17 (pp. 5-6).

But anachronism in Philippine metrical romances goes beyond being a standard element of the genre. As printed books, as articles in the history of Philippine literary publishing, the romances also bear about them a sense of incongruity in place and time.

In Philippine poetry, metrical romances come in two forms—the *awit* and the *corrido*. The main distinction between them lies in the measure of their lines and in their tempos: the *awit* is made up of lines in twelve syllables and is recited or set to music in *andante*; the *corrido*, in eight syllables and in *allegro*.² Both forms consist of stanzas in quatrains, typically in monorhyme. They are also alike in terms of subject matter and style. Both the *awit* and the *corrido* ‘deal with chivalric, religious, legendary, and folktale matter and both may be read for the story they tell and for their thought and beauty of expression’.³ According to Damiana L. Eugenio, in the invaluable study *Awit and Corrido: Philippine Metrical Romances*, the poems adapted characters, settings, and plots as well as literary conventions and devices from the sagas of Charlemagne, Arthur, and the Fall of Troy; the legends and history of Spain and the Spanish *libros de caballerias* (chivalry books); Philippine folklore; the lives of the saints; and the Bible.⁴ Drawn from Spanish models, the romances tell of the lives of monarchs, warriors, and saints in far away kingdoms (usually European) and bygone times (ancient or medieval). The most common themes in *awits* and *corridos* are romantic love, religion and didacticism, and magic and marvel.⁵

² Gabriel A. Bernardo, ‘Francisco Balagtas and His “Florante at Laura”’, in *Pinagdaanang buhay ni Florante at ni Laura sa Kahariang Albania*, ed. by Gabriel A. Bernardo, et al. (Manila: Philippine Writers’ League, 1941), pp. 1-23 (p. 3).

³ Damiana L. Eugenio, *Awit and Corrido: Philippine Metrical Romances* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1987), p. xxv.

⁴ pp. xix-xxi.

⁵ Eugenio, p. xxxii

The genre of the metrical romance was introduced into the Philippines by the Spanish colonizers. Vicente Barrantes suggests that the romances came in as early as the sixteenth century, with the establishment of colonial rule by Miguel Lopez de Legazpi in 1565. It is not doubtful, Barrantes claims, that Legazpi's soldiers brought romances and narratives and books of chivalry along with their armour.⁶ This seems plausible enough considering the prolific production and 'enormous popular appeal' of chivalric romances and sentimental novels in Spain during the sixteenth century.⁷ Also telling is the fact that Spanish royal decrees prohibiting the entry of books of profanity and fiction into the Indies (the Spanish colonies) were in effect even before the Philippines was colonized; one was issued by Queen Isabela in 1531 and another by Prince Philip in 1543. The latter decree made specific mention of romances ('libros de Romance, que traten de materias profanas, y fabulosas historias fingidas').⁸ Nevertheless, romances and novels found their way into the Spanish colonies in the Americas. While in theory forbidden, the importation of works of fiction into the new continent was 'only grudgingly tolerated' in practice, according to Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin. 'Hardly a ship sailed [from Spain] at certain times without such books in its cargo'.⁹ Resourceful book dealers found means to supply the lucrative demand for fiction in the Americas, and 'the sale of printed works of all kinds

⁶ 'No es dudose, que a par que los soldados de Legaspi llevaban de Mexico entre sus arreos de guerra los romances y relaciones de nuestra literatura popular y tal cual libros de caballerias....' *El teatro Tagalo* (Madrid: Tipografia de Manuel Ginés Hernandez, 1890), p. 20.

⁷ Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450-1800*, trans. by David Gerard (London: Verso, 1976; repr. 1998), p. 286.

⁸ *Recopilacion de leyes de los reynos de las Indias. Mandada imprimir y publicar por la Magestad Catolica del Rey Don Carlos II*, 4 vols (Madrid: Antonio Balbas, 1756), I, law iij, title xxiv. Quoted in Vicente S. Hernández, *History of Books and Libraries in the Philippines 1521-1900* (Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 1996), p. 107.

⁹ Febvre and Martin, p. 208.

proceeded quietly as a legitimate part of the commercial activity of colonial society'.¹⁰ It was from the Mexican port of Juan Gallego in 1564 that Legazpi set out for the East with four vessels of about 350 men.¹¹ Among them, there must have been those who held an enthusiasm for the chivalric romances at best or a general knowledge of them at least. Indeed, it is not unlikely that they brought along some of their favourite books for the long and dangerous expedition. Vicente S. Hernández is certain that, during the early years of the Spanish regime, 'fiction and secular writing reached the Philippines, at least up to the harbor'.¹²

Metrical romances, as well as Spanish tales and legends, were transmitted to the Philippine islands if not physically in the form of books then orally. In the seminal study on Philippine metrical romances, Dean S. Fansler supposes that many of the romantic tales of Spain were told to the Filipino natives by the soldiers of Legazpi, 'just as the missionary priests lost no time in introducing to the Islands the 'Pasion' [the Passion of Jesus Christ], the saint-legends, and the religious plays (*autos sacramentales*)'.¹³ More stories must have been disseminated through oral transmission as the Spanish regime grew in the Philippines in the seventeenth century, with the religious material originating from Spanish priests and the profane from Mexican soldiers, sailors, and citizens who came via the Manila-Acapulco galleon trade route to serve in the administration of the new colony under the viceroyalty of Nueva España

¹⁰ Irving A. Leonard, *Books of the Brave: Being an Account of Books and of Men in the Spanish Conquest and Settlement of the Sixteenth-Century New World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949; repr. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 182.

¹¹ Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People*, 8th edn (Quezon City: Garotech Publishing, 1990), p. 74.

¹² p. 20. Hernández notes that, 'Since Manila at that time had a very small population, it was easy to exert tight control over the shipments'. This control was further strengthened with the establishment of the Manila branch of the Inquisition of New Spain (Mexico) in 1583 (p. 20).

¹³ 'Metrical Romances in the Philippines', *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, 29 (1916), 203-34 (p. 204), repr. in JSTOR, Stable URL <<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-8715%28191604%2F06%2929%3A112%3C203%3AMRITP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-J>>.

(Mexico).¹⁴ The metrical romances took root in the Philippine islands, and by the second half of the eighteenth century, local versions were already being written.¹⁵

Awits and *corridos* became 'standard literary fare' long before the close of the century.¹⁶

Even though printed books, pamphlets, and other materials were produced in the Philippines since the late sixteenth century, local metrical romances were still circulated by oral means and in manuscript form during the eighteenth century. This was due to the prohibitive cost of printing and the strict censorship enforced by the government and the Church, who also owned and operated the presses at the time.¹⁷ The romances may well have begun appearing in print late in the century, but no such books from that period have survived. Fansler reports that the oldest printed copy he came across was dated 1815.¹⁸ During the nineteenth century, metrical romances were printed in various local languages and produced in large numbers. In Tagalog alone, there were around two hundred titles published.¹⁹ New original narratives also began appearing late in the century; they featured native characters and settings based on Filipino history and folklore. The romances 'were printed in the cities and towns and then hawked, sold in sidewalk stalls, and brought to the most remote *barrios* by itinerant peddlers'.²⁰ They became part of Philippine life and culture in both city and town. E. Arsenio Manuel notes that the poems enjoyed an immense popularity with Filipinos from all social classes. 'Indeed everybody found in

¹⁴ Bienvenido L. Lumbea, *Tagalog Poetry 1570-1898: Tradition and Influences in Its Development* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1986), p. 53.

¹⁵ Eugenio, p. xvi.

¹⁶ Lumbea, p. 52.

¹⁷ Eugenio, p. xvi.

¹⁸ p. 204.

¹⁹ Eugenio, p. xvii.

²⁰ Eugenio, p. xviii.

the metrical romances endless entertainment, drawing from them quotations to prove a point, reciting them, singing them, and even dancing to their musical renditions'.²¹

Considering that the *awits* and the *corridos* were generally about persons, places, and periods all so remote and alien to Filipinos, it seems peculiar enough that the romances were the most popular form of secular literature during the Spanish colonial period in the Philippines. Perhaps stranger still is the fact that they continued to be printed in the twentieth century, when a new world view was revealed to the nation and when great strides were being taken towards modernization under the American administration. The old materials were reprinted or issued in new editions; new titles also appeared, some even as late as the 1940s. Harley Harris Bartlett notes that 'almost all of the American period was characterized by an exuberant output of [the] old-fashioned poetry'.²² However, what is particularly remarkable is that the poems not only continued to be published but also actually maintained their immense popularity. Metrical romances were literary bestsellers in the Philippines during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Scholars primarily attribute the tremendous appeal held by the metrical romances during the Spanish colonial period to the temporary release they provided Filipinos from the harsh realities of existence under foreign rule.²³ Pardo de Tavera offers a further explanation, a crucial fact that accounts for the popularity of the genre: it was the only type of secular literature 'accessible to the Filipinos of little culture, and also to those of the better class'.²⁴ But in the early twentieth century—when Filipinos experienced basic freedoms they never knew before, including freedom of the press

²¹ 'Folk Literature', *The Philippines Quarterly* (June 1952), 24-9 (p. 28).

²² 'Vernacular Literature in the Philippines: A Book Collector's Year in Manila', *Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review*, 42 (1936), 214-27 (p. 218).

²³ Eugenio, p. xvii.

²⁴ p. 5.

and freedom of enterprise; when public education was widely available to all; when massive improvements in public health and welfare, communication and transportation, and industry and trade brought benefits even to the remote barrios—what appeal could the metrical romances still have offered its audiences? Why did the fantastic lives of Don Felizardo and Doña Rogeria of Barcelona, or Prince Modesto of Ireland and Princess Aurora of Italy, or Princess Aurea of Germany and Prince Gaudencio of Belgium retain a grip on the imaginations of the Filipinos? Why were metrical romances published and distributed in extraordinary numbers throughout the Philippines from the 1900s till the 1920s? How did they become literary bestsellers of the time?

The case of the bookseller-stationer-publisher Juan Martinez offers probable answers to these questions. Martinez seems an ideal subject in the study of early twentieth-century Philippine publishing. Like many other members of the book trade in his day, he made a lucrative business out of printing, publishing, and selling books in the vernacular languages (Tagalog and Kapampangan, in his case). *Awits* and *corridos* were valuable products in commercial ventures such as Martinez's since the works involved minimal investment and assured steady profit. The metrical romances became, as it were, backlist items for publishers like him. Yet, in a crucial matter, Martinez is unlike the others: there is slightly more information available in his case.

As a rule, materials on Philippine publishing are scarce since the assembly, organisation, and preservation of data on the local book trade have been pursued neither exhaustively nor efficiently throughout the history of the country. Accounts and records have been kept in a haphazard manner whether by public agencies or by the publishers themselves. Publishing data were and generally still are scattered, incomplete, or inaccurate. Many documents were lost during the Philippine

Revolution (1896-1898), the Filipino-American War (1899-1902), the Japanese Occupation (1942-1945), and the massive destruction of Manila during the end of World War II (1945). What had survived, including books themselves, still had to withstand the test of time and the elements (humidity, fires, floods, earthquakes, termites). Many materials did not endure. In Martinez's case, as in that of most pre-World War II publishers, no business records appear to have survived. But unlike the other publishers, valuable information on Martinez's life and publishing experiences is available in the *Dictionary of Philippine Biography (DPB)*.²⁵ The *DPB*'s biographical account was based on information gathered in interviews with Martinez's daughter Juliana, sister-in-law Praxedes Sayo Soriano, and former employee Ignacio Luna (now all deceased).

The *DPB* entry is the most if not the only authoritative account on Martinez. Other sources do little more than replicate this text. One is the programme for the unveiling of the National Historical Institute marker for the 'Libreria ni [Bookshop of] Juan Martinez' on 8 January 1960, an event which also commemorated the 100th birth anniversary of Martinez (24 November 1859).²⁶ Aside from reproducing the *DPB* entry in full, the programme contains tributes by various government officials, some of which raise interesting but minor details about Martinez and his business. Another source is the article by Fe L. Alvarez published in the *Journal of Philippine Librarianship* in 1968, which provides a partial list of Martinez's publications but is

²⁵ 'Martinez, Juan', in *Dictionary of Philippine Biography*, by E. Arsenio Manuel, 4 vols (Quezon City: Filipiniana Publications, 1955-1995), I (1955), 275-8. The only other member of the book trade included in the *DPB* who is relevant to this study is Juan Fajardo (1875-1941), in III (1986), 236-7. Fajardo was a printer and lithographer who produced many metrical romances for publishers and booksellers, including Martinez, during the early twentieth century.

²⁶ *100th Birth Anniversary of Juan Martinez* (Manila: n. pub., 1960). The marker was placed on the site of the firm of Martinez's son Roberto, R. Martinez & Sons, in Quezon City.

otherwise useful only as an example of inferior scholarship.²⁷ Alvarez's article is nothing more than a cut-and-paste job, reproducing in verbatim the *DPB* entry and the account of the 1957 *Industrial Philippines Yearbook* on the printing business of Roberto Martinez, the son of Martinez. However, another kind of source of information on Martinez does exist: copies of many of his publications, particularly the metrical romances, have survived and are now accessible in libraries in and outside the Philippines. The books provide illuminating details on his practices as a publisher and bookseller.

Martinez was one of the most prominent and successful publishers of Philippine vernacular literature in his day. His case offers a valuable perspective on the popularity of metrical romances as well as general insights on the business of books in the Philippines during the early twentieth century.

Juan Martinez (1859-1934) began his trade late in the Spanish colonial period as an itinerant peddler. According to the *DPB*, he sold rosaries, scapulars, *estampas* (printed illustrations of saints), novenas, *awits* and *corridos*, and other religious objects in front of churches in Manila and in the neighbouring towns and provinces. The revolutions of 1896 and 1899 drove him to the province and out of business, but he always managed to re-establish his trade in Manila. By 1900, he had settled in the city and was operating a stand selling the same wares near the Binondo Church, in an alley (Rosario Street) off Plaza Calderon de la Barca. In 1902, he set up a small shop with the sign 'Libreria de J. Martinez' (Bookshop of J. Martinez) in Plaza Calderon and soon had four to six people under his employment.²⁸

²⁷ 'History of the Imprenta Libreria y Papeleria de Juan Martinez', *Journal of Philippine Librarianship*, 1 (March 1968), 47-61.

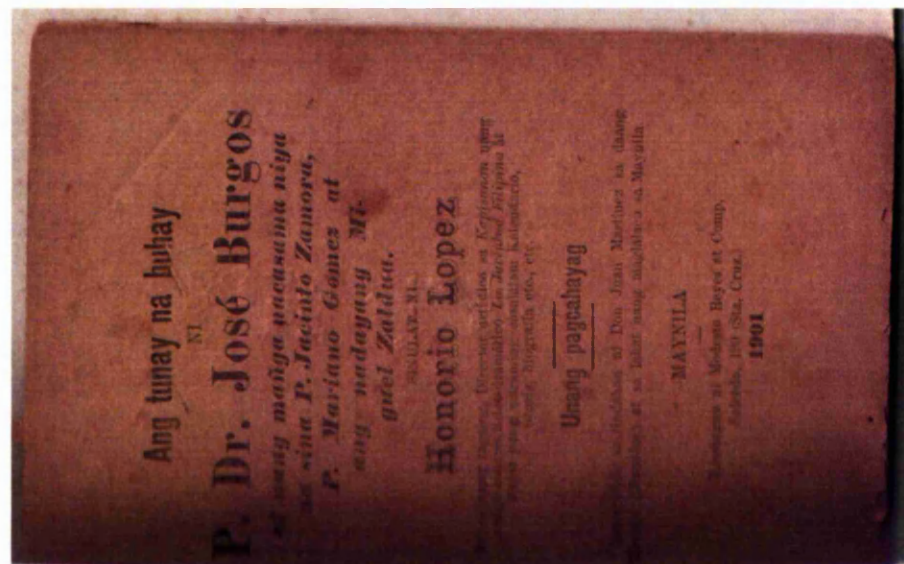
²⁸ 'Martinez', *DPB*, 1, pp. 275-6.

Martinez did not limit his business to retailing; he ventured into publishing eventually, beginning possibly as early as 1901. In this respect, the first edition ('unang pagcahayag') of *José Burgos* by Honorio M. Lopez is telling.²⁹ The cover of the book bears the imprint 'IMP. [Imprenta] DE SANTA CRUZ DE A. NAM & Co.' (Santa Cruz Printing Press of A. Nam and Company) and the date of publication '1902'. An advertisement appears above the imprint declaring that the book was being sold at the shop of Doña Potenciana Sayo in Rosario Street in Binondo and by all vendors in Manila ('Ipinagbibili sa tindahan ni D.a Potenciana Sayo sa daang Rosario (Binundoc) at sa lahat nang maglalaco sa Maynila'). The title page of the same book, however, offers contradicting details (FIGURE 13). Its imprint reads 'Limbagan ni Modesto Reyes at Comp' (Printing Press of Modesto Reyes and Company) and the date '1901'. The title page displays the same advertisement, in nearly identical wording as in the cover except for the reference to 'the shop of Don Juan Martinez' instead of Doña Potenciana Sayo's. This disparity is striking but not so significant in light of the fact that Sayo was the wife of Martinez. It seems doubtful that she operated a shop separate from and yet on the same street as her husband's. Furthermore, no other mention or record on her establishment exists. While one can only guess why her name appears in the cover of this edition, what can be assumed with certainty is that the shop of Sayo and the shop of Martinez were one and the same. As for explaining how one book came to have two imprints and two dates of publication, one can again only speculate. What seems definite enough is that either Modesto Reyes or A. Nam was responsible for the printing of the book but not necessarily for its publishing. The advertisements suggest that Martinez had some involvement in the publication. He himself, in fact, published the second edition of

²⁹ References to the metrical romances in this chapter are in short-title form. For full titles, see the Bibliography.



(a)



(b)

FIGURE 13. Front cover (a) and title page (b) of the first edition of *Ang tunay na buhay ni P. Dr. José Burgos* (The True Life of Fr Dr José Burgos, 1901/1902) by Honorio Lopez. Note disparities in the advertisement (text above the imprint), the imprint, and the date of publication. (Images reduced; reproduced from the copy of the University of the Philippines Main Library, Filipiniana Section.)

the text in 1912 (FIGURE 14). Perhaps he financed the printing of the first edition of *José Burgos* thereby taking on the role of publisher himself. Perhaps the edition was his first effort at book publishing and the paratextual inconsistencies were more a result of inexperience rather than carelessness. Even if no firm conclusions may be drawn on this matter, the first edition of *José Burgos* is significant for being the earliest metrical romance that can be associated with the business of Martinez and for indicating connections between him and some printers of his day.

As a publisher, Martinez initially issued 'old popular works', which he had printed in the presses of friends.³⁰ Undoubtedly metrical romances were among these works. But it is difficult to identify which titles were actually published by Martinez, for early twentieth-century books usually bear the imprints of their printers rather than their publishers, which was the common practice in Philippine publishing during the time. What is certain is that Martinez had business relations with the printers A. Nam, Modesto Reyes, and Juan Fajardo. According to the Philippine bibliography by W.E. Retana, Nam printed one metrical romance title in 1901 and another in 1902; Reyes printed eight in 1901 and nine in 1902; Fajardo printed seven in 1904 to 1905.³¹ It is likely that Martinez published some of these titles.

Evidence of the collaboration between Martinez and Fajardo exists in the publication of *Belmore y Enriqueta ó La medalla de oro* (Belmore and Enriqueta or The Golden Medallion), a verse drama in three parts published in 1904. Each of the three books bears the imprint 'Imp. de Fajardo y Comp.^a' (Printing Press of Fajardo and Company) and the declaration of copyright in Martinez's name. This seems an indication of the figures behind the publication: Fajardo as its printer and Martinez as

³⁰ 'Martinez', *DPB*, 1, p. 276.

³¹ *Aparato bibliográfico de la historia general de Filipinas deducido de la colección que posee en Barcelona La Compañía General de Tabacos de dichas islas*, 3 vols (Madrid: Imprenta de la Sucesora de M. Minuesa de los Ríos, 1906; repr. Manila: Philippine Historical Series, 1964), III, pp. 1463-89.

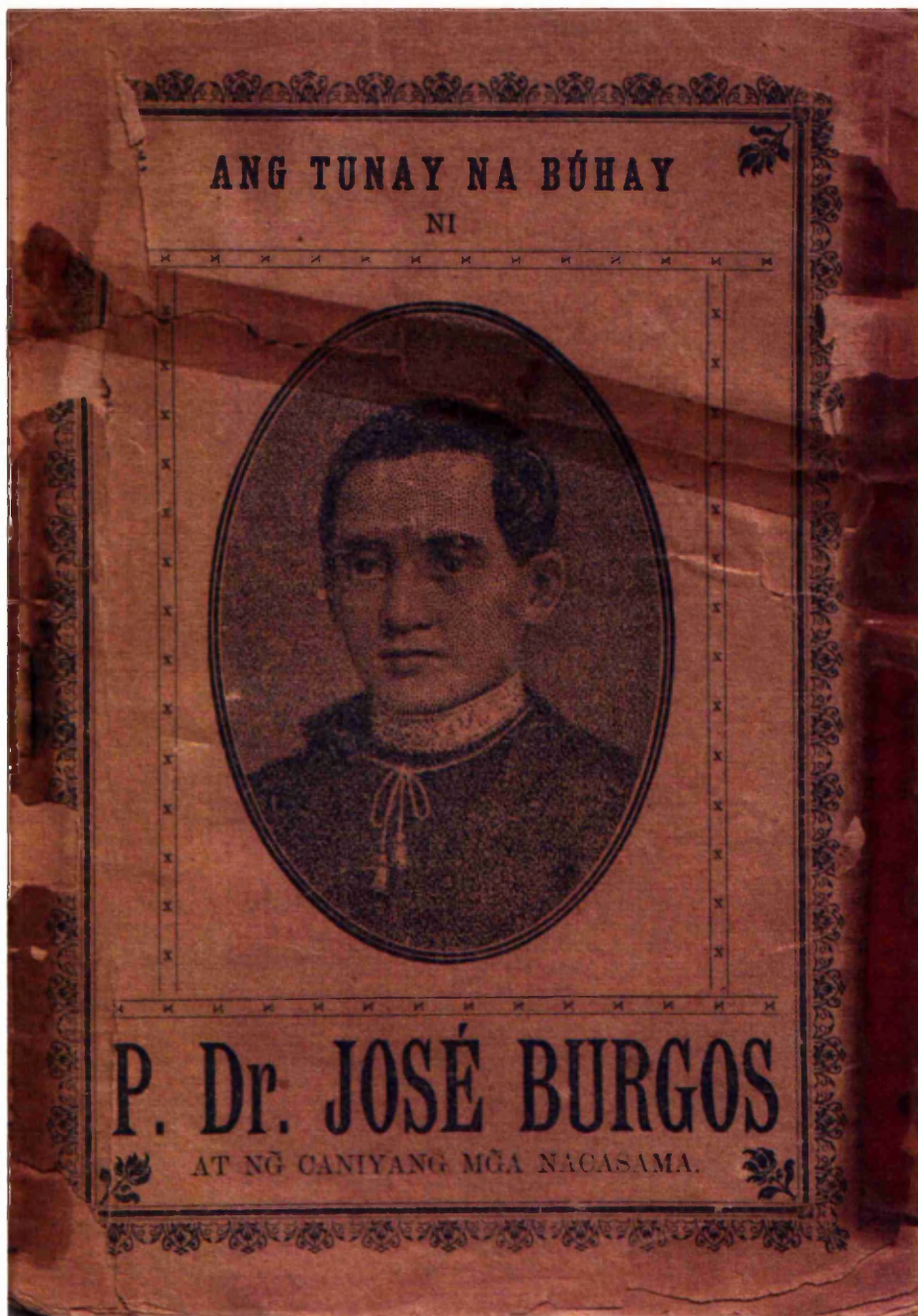


FIGURE 14. Front cover of the second edition of *José Burgos* (1912).

(Image in actual size; reproduced from the copy of the Damiana L. Eugenio Folklore Room, Department of English and Comparative Literature, University of the Philippines.)

its publisher. The back covers of the books feature an advertisement for the 'Libreria de J. Martinez', listing the products offered by the shop: Spanish and English language textbooks; books on Spanish laws (which were still in effect in the Philippines at that time); dictionaries of various languages (Spanish, English, and native languages); novels in Spanish by European and American authors; religious books (prayers, novenas, *pasións*, catechisms, etc) in Spanish, Tagalog, and Kapampangan; vocabularies, *awits*, *corridos*, and novenas in Tagalog, Kapampangan, Visayan, and Iloko; notebooks, papers, envelopes; inks, pencils, pens, erasers; and calendars (FIGURE 15). The list offers a glimpse of the intellectual and cultural currents in a nation still deeply influenced by its Spanish heritage but living under a new colonial power (the United States) that had introduced a new language (English). The list also reflects how Martinez's business had expanded and diversified by 1904.

In 1905, Martinez acquired a Minerva platen jobber and began printing various publications himself.³² He established his press in Calle Jolo, also in Binondo, while maintaining the original shop in Plaza Calderon. His business had grown into the 'Imprenta, Libreria at Papeleria ni J. Martinez' (Printing Press, Bookshop, and Stationery Shop of J. Martinez). By 1917, he had three shops in Binondo (Calle Estraude, Plaza Calderon, and Plaza Moraga) and one in Intramuros (Cabildo Street). The business of Martinez flourished during the second decade of the twentieth century: he was operating four shops, selling books in retail and wholesale, printing his own publications as well as accepting all sorts of print jobs from clients, and publishing a stream of books. Among establishments of his kind, he employed the largest number of workers, about fifty at one time.³³

³² 'Martinez', *DPB*, I, p. 276.

³³ 'Martinez', *DPB*, I, p. 276.

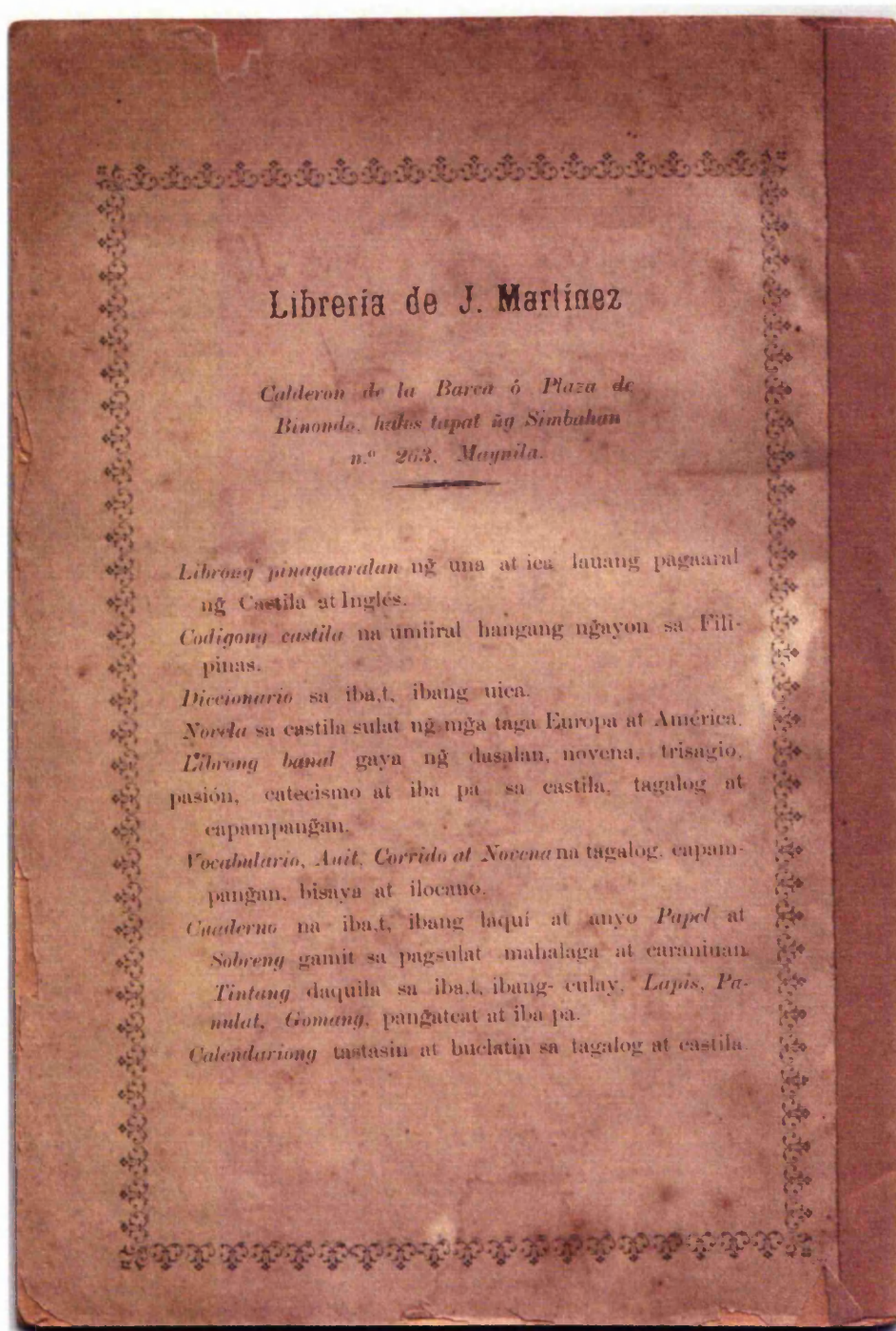


FIGURE 15. Back cover of the *Primera parte del drama fantástico y en verso tagalo: titulado Belmore y Enriqueta ó La medalla de oro* (The First Part of the Fantastic Drama in Tagalog Verse, Entitled Belmore and Enriqueta, or The Gold Medallion), printed by Fajardo in 1904 and possibly published by Martinez.

(Image in actual size; reproduced from the copy of the Damiana L. Eugenio Folklore Room, Department of English and Comparative Literature, University of the Philippines.)

Metrical romances figure significantly among the books published by Martinez. He issued over one hundred titles in Tagalog and over thirty in Kapampangan.³⁴ His romances look almost like pamphlets: thin books, ranging from 32 to 96 pages, in octavo size (around 18 x 13 cm) and printed on newsprint. They were bound in gatherings, typically of four leaves, glued together in the spine, with newsprint wrappers for their covers. Generally, the front covers displayed the same textual elements as the title pages of the books: the title of the work, the author (if known or acknowledged), the number of the edition or reprinting, Martinez's imprint, and the date (if identified). But the text on the covers were usually enclosed in borders, set in a fancier type than in the title pages, and occasionally printed in coloured ink. Some covers also featured ornate illustrations. Martinez apparently left nothing to waste in his metrical romance books; he usually used every available page to advertise his business.³⁵ Typically, the insides of the front and back covers as well as the back cover itself were printed with lists of titles available in his bookshops (FIGURE 16). According to his back cover advertisements, he had published at least fifty-four Tagalog metrical romance titles by 1907, eighty-nine by 1914, and one hundred by 1921.

Martinez generally printed 5000 copies per edition of a metrical romance; he reduced the print run to 2000 to 3000 copies for the less popular titles and increased it to 10,000 for the more popular ones.³⁶ The editions took a year or so to sell out, after which new impressions were made to meet the public demand.³⁷ Many of Martinez's titles went on to second or third reprints, some even to fifth such as Francisco

³⁴ 'Martinez', *DPB*, I, p. 277.

³⁵ A parallel example of this unabashed self-promotion is Martinez's use of advertisements as frontispieces, as in his 1917 edition of the Tagalog novel *Ang Bathalang Dula* (The Divine Play) an adaptation of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* by Rosendo Ignacio. This also relates to the issue of the quality of Martinez's publications and his standards as a printer and publisher (see below).

³⁶ 'Martinez', *DPB*, I, p. 277.

³⁷ 'Martinez', *DPB*, I, p. 277.

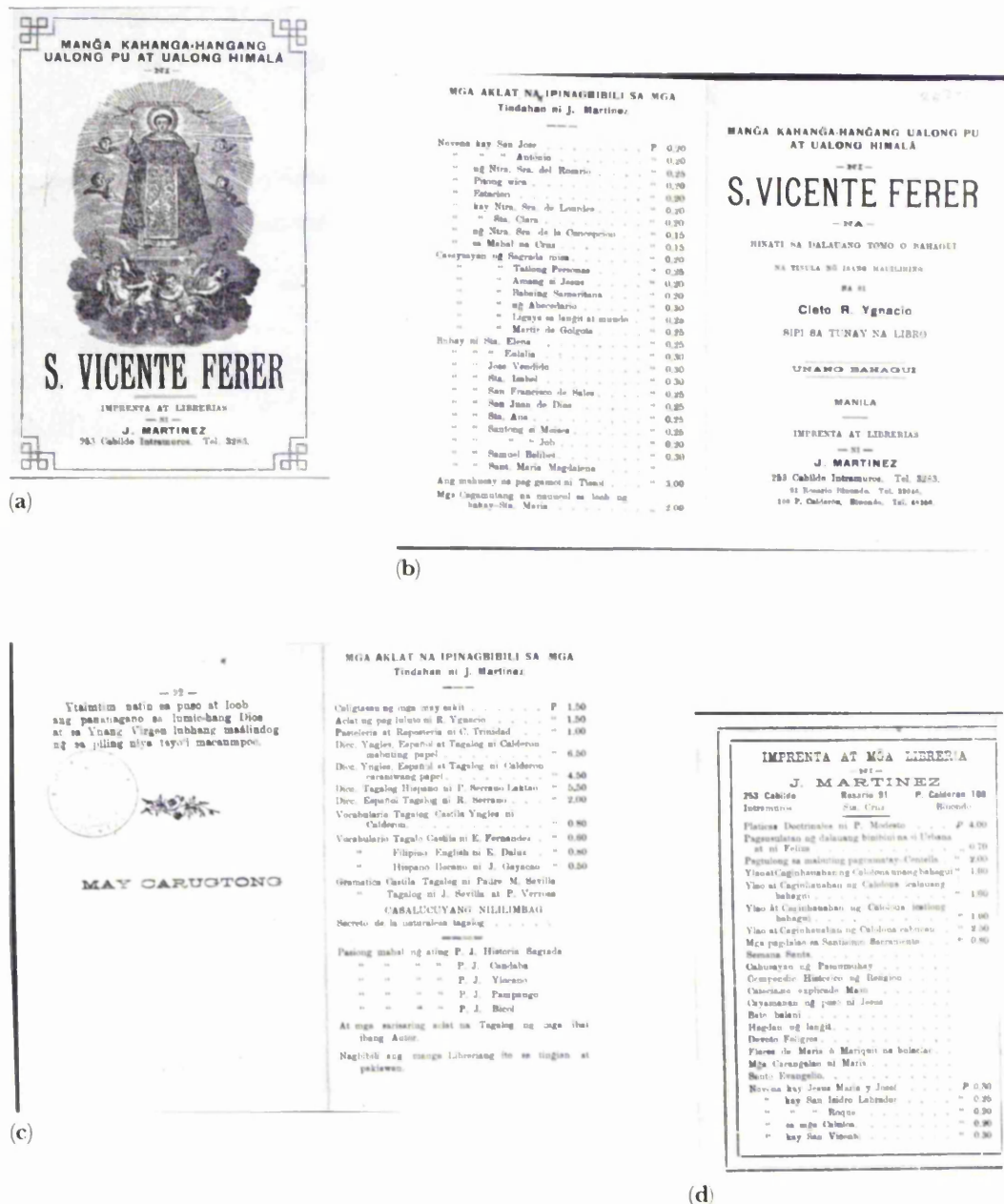


FIGURE 16. Front cover (a), inside front cover and title page (b), last page and inside back cover (c), and back cover (d) of *Manga kahanga-hangang ualong pu at ualong himala* ni S. Vicente Ferer (The Eighty-eight Wondrous Miracles of St Vicente Ferer).

(Images reduced and rendered in black and white; reproduced from copy of the School of Oriental and African Studies Library, University of London.)

Baltazar's *Florante at Laura* and Honorio M. Lopez's *José Rizal*. The reprints were made from the stereo plates of the original edition until the plates were either broken or totally unserviceable, then a new edition would be set.³⁸ A copy of the second impression of *Juan Labuyo*, printed in 1921, displays this practice. As any other publication in newsprint, the book bears the ill effects of time: its leaves are yellow with age, foxed in some places, and crumbling in the edges. Otherwise, the book is in fair condition with complete pages and intact binding. But its cover illustration is very faint, nearly indecipherable, evidently the result of re-using a well-worn plate (FIGURE 17). The book also suggests the standards Martinez maintained as a printer and publisher, which may not have been all that meticulous, particularly as far as metrical romances were concerned.

The texts of Martinez's romances in general, and even the covers and titles pages in some instances (FIGURE 18), are riddled with typographical errors. Many of his romances, too, bear no date of publication, even in cases where the number of reprinting is identified. Then, his imprint appears in a number of variations. For example, a series of books published in 1915 use the following imprints: 'Limb. [Limbagan] ni J. Martinez' (on the cover of *Graciano at Gaudencio*), 'Imprenta at Libreria ni J. Martinez' (on the title pages of *San Francisco de Sales* and *San Isidrong Magsasaca*), and 'Libreria de J. Martinez' (on the cover of *Poncio Pilato*). The *Jose Vendido* edition (no date, but internal evidence reveals that it was published after 1925) offers a further example of the different versions of Martinez's business name. The imprint on the cover and title page is 'Imprenta, Libreria at Papeleria ni J. Martinez', but the advertisements refer to the establishment as 'Imprenta at Libreria ni J. Martinez' (inside of the front cover), 'mga aklatan ni [bookshops of] J. Martinez'

³⁸ 'Martinez', *DPB*, I, p. 277.

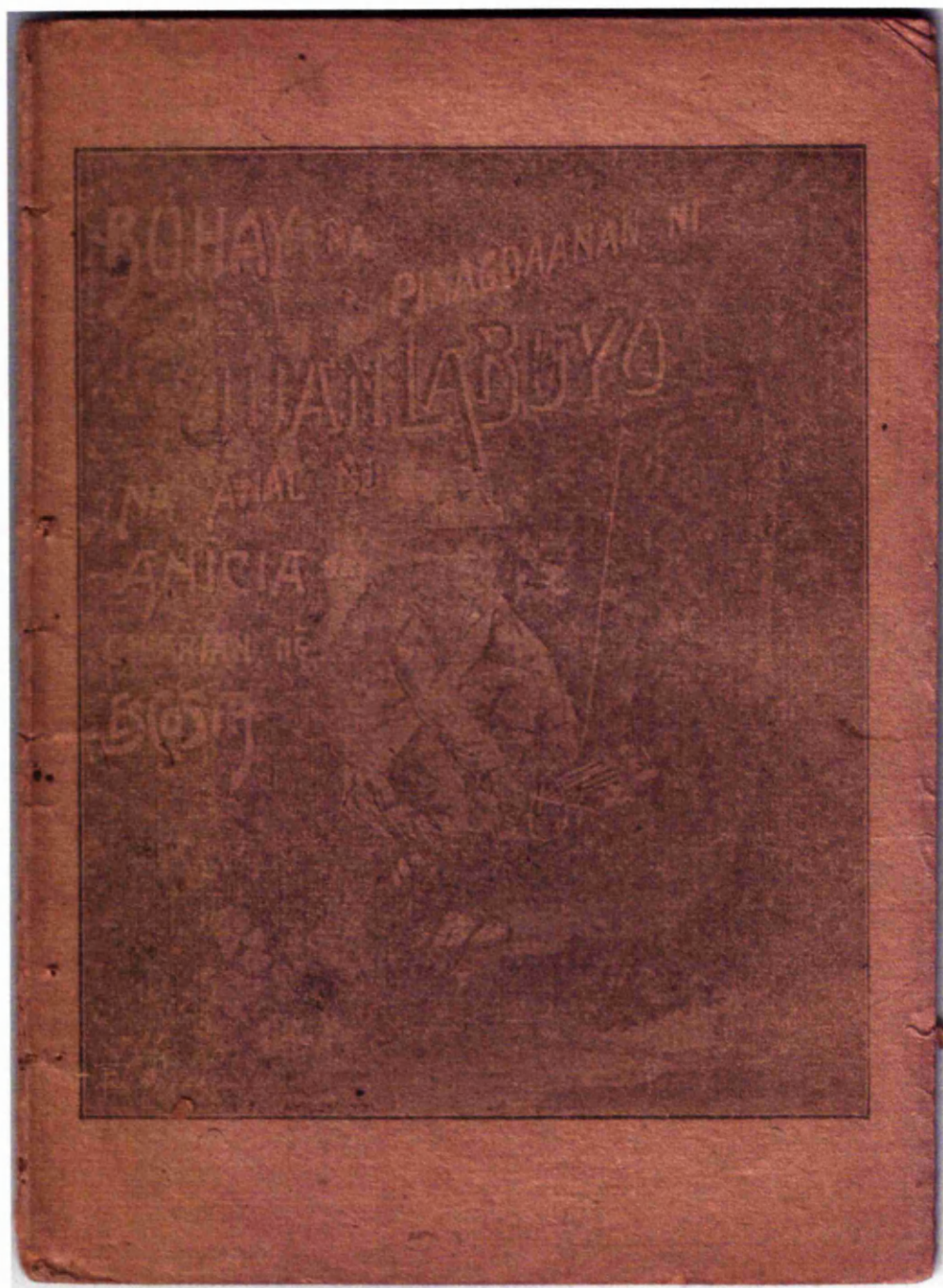
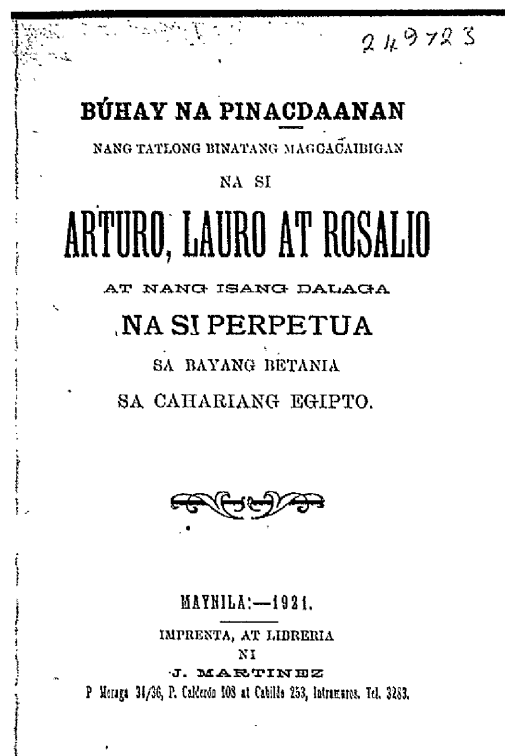


FIGURE 17. Cover of *Buhay na pinagdaanan ni Juan Labuyo na anac ni Anicia sa caharian ng Escosia* (The Life of Juan Labuyo Son of Anicia in the Kingdom of Escosia), 2nd printing (1921).

(Image in actual size; reproduced from the copy of the Damiana L. Eugenio Folklore Room, Department of English and Comparative Literature, University of the Philippines.)



(a)



(b)

FIGURE 18. Front cover (a) and title page (b) of *Buhay na pinagdaanan nang tatlong binatang magcacabigan na si Arturo, Lauro at Rosalio at nang isang dalaga na si Perpetua sa bayang Betania sa cahariang Egipto* ('The Life of the Three Young Friends Arturo, Lauro and Rosalio and the Maiden Perpetua in the Town of Bethany in the Kingdom of Egypt'). Typographical errors are underscored in red. Note also the slight variation between the imprints, with a comma included in that of the title page.

(Image reduced and rendered in black and white; reproduced from the copy of the School of Oriental and African Studies Library, University of London.)

(inside of the back cover), and 'Imprenta at Mga Libreria ni J. Martinez' (back cover).

On the whole, Martinez seems to have paid little attention to details, leaving errors and inconsistencies unchecked. Perhaps this was done to spare the expense of resetting types or having new plates made. Perhaps these details—textual accuracy, complete bibliographical information, specific business identity—were simply taken for granted by Martinez either because he did not know better or because they did not matter all too much in his day.

It is important to consider that Martinez was operating at a time when native sensibilities were changing under the American influence, when Filipinos were taking on for themselves the ideals of liberty, resourcefulness, and self-improvement held by their new colonizers. It was a time when entrepreneurship was new, young, and seemingly boundless in the Philippines. The opportunity to engage and succeed in business became open to individuals like Martinez, who came from a poor family and had received hardly any formal education but who nevertheless possessed an enterprising spirit. It was also a time when censorship, which had been imposed by Spanish colonial rule for nearly three hundred years, was finally lifted. This allowed secular texts to circulate more widely, which in turn fostered the habit of reading in more Filipinos. Encouraged by the great interest in reading displayed by the public, many entrepreneurs or such aspirants set up publishing houses and found a profitable livelihood in the book trade, according to Hermenegildo Cruz.³⁹ But the publishing industry at the time was not at all organised much less guided by any set of professional principles or standards. Like other publishers of his day, Martinez must

³⁹ 'Ang malaking pagkakahilig sa pagbabasa sa panahóng itó ng mga taó maging dito sa atin at sa ibang lupaín, ay siyang naging dahil ng pagbubukás ng maraming bahay-pálimbagan na ngayo'y isang malakás na hanap-búhay ng mga mayaring matatalino't masisipag; sapagka't ang ganoóng hanap-búhay ay katulad din namán ng ibá na walang ibang hangad kundi ang kumita ng salaping higit kay sa sa ipinuhunan'. *Kun Sino Ang Kumathá Ng "Florante"; Kasaysayan Ng Búhay ni Francisco Baltazar at Pag-Uulat Nang Kanyang Kanumunga't Kadakilaan* (Maynila: Libreria "Manila Filatélico," 1906), p. 42.

have had only his experiences and instincts to direct him in the general management of his business and in the finer aspects of printing and publishing. Like other entrepreneurs, he must have engaged in trade primarily for profit. As Cruz noted in 1906, the publishing houses of the day did not differ from other businesses: their ultimate goal was to make money.⁴⁰

Martinez sold his metrical romances at twenty, twenty-five, or thirty centavos (P0.20, 0.25, or 0.30) each, prices well within the reach of the masses. In 1908, unskilled labourers earned daily wages ranging from twenty to forty centavos (P0.20-0.40) and skilled labourers from one peso and twenty centavos (P1.20) to five pesos (P5.00).⁴¹ In 1922, the minimum daily wage for all labourers ranged from forty centavos (P0.40) to two pesos and forty centavos (P2.40).⁴² The metrical romances were cheap books suited for popular consumption as opposed to other local or foreign works of fiction that appealed to and could easily be afforded only by the higher classes. A rather extreme example of such a work is an imported edition of the Spanish novel *Walter el bastardo ó poder del amor* (Walter the Bastard or The Power of Love) by Angeles Hernández de Larrea sold by Martinez in his bookshops. The two-volume novel in fine binding ('bien encuadernos') was priced at eighteen pesos (P18), as listed in an advertisement in a Tagalog novel published by Martinez in 1917. Martinez also sold his books at wholesale to other traders and vendors, who in turn sold them in front of the churches, in the markets, and in the sidewalk stalls of Manila and the nearby provinces.

⁴⁰ *Kin Sino Ang Kumathâ Ng "Florante"*, p. 42.

⁴¹ Hamilton W. Wright, *A Handbook of the Philippines*, 2nd edn (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co, 1908), p. 356. In Philippine currency, the basic unit is the peso (P), which is made up of one hundred centavos.

⁴² *Facts About the Philippines* (n.p.: n. pub., 1924), p. 24.

How Martinez was able to sell his metrical romances at inexpensive prices is clear enough: he printed large editions and used the cheapest kind of paper. Possibly, he was also able to limit his production costs by doing without the services of professional editors and proofreaders. His Tagalog romances, for instance, still kept to the spelling and style used during the Spanish colonial period despite the prevailing practice among writers and publishers of using the modern Tagalog orthography, which abandoned the stylistic influences of the Spanish language and followed a spelling based on the native Tagalog syllabary. Other publishing houses evidently employed editors since they issued romances in new Tagalog versions, as in the case of the Imprenta at Libreria ni P. Sayo balo ni Soriano (Printing Press and Bookshop of P. Sayo widow of Soriano), another prolific publisher of romances.⁴³ Martinez's texts hardly deviated from that of nineteenth-century editions; his romances were essentially reprints of old texts. He also left typographical errors and inconsistencies unchecked in his romances, as pointed out earlier. In other publications, he took the effort to rectify printing mistakes, as in his edition of the Tagalog novel *Matilde Ligaya* by Jose Villamor, published in 1907, which includes a table of errors and corrections at the end of the text. He may have availed of and consequently paid for the labour of an editor or a proofreader in this case (or it is also likely that the author was behind the corrections). With the metrical romances, Martinez certainly managed to keep his book prices cheap also because, more often than not, he was able to avoid paying for another kind of labour, the most crucial in any publication, that of the authors.

⁴³ P. (Praxedes) Sayo widow of Soriano was the sister of Martinez's wife. It was Martinez himself who introduced his sister-in-law to the book trade and made her a very close rival ('Martinez', *DPB*, I, p. 278). Sayo was also a bookseller, stationer, printer, and publisher. In 1915, she was operating three shops: one in the same Binondo street (Rosario) as Martinez's establishment, another in Plaza del Conde also in Binondo, and the third in Azcarraga in the Manila suburb of Tondo. Incidentally, her imprint also appears in various forms in her books.

Author's royalties, as the *DPB* notes, did not bother Martinez much. In accordance with the customary practice of the day, he 'bought the author's work outright, or paid him partly in cash and partly in copies, or gave him one-fifth of the printed copies'.⁴⁴ The *DPB* cites four cases of such transactions: Martinez acquired the copyright of three *comedias* by Gregorio Cleofas for twenty pesos (P20) in 1910; an English-Spanish-Tagalog vocabulary by Sofronio G. Calderon for one hundred pesos (P100) in 1913; *Patnubay ng Pagsinta* (Guide to Romantic Courtship) by P. H. Poblete for one hundred and fifty pesos (P150) and 3000 copies of the book in 1914; and *Tulang Historia* (Poem of History) by Nemesio Magboo for 3000 copies of the book in 1916.⁴⁵ With the metrical romances, Martinez had very few authors to deal with, for they were mostly unknown or dead, or both.

Most Philippine romances are of anonymous authorship. According to Eugenio, earlier authors left their works unsigned, indicated their initials in the closing lines of the poems, or used pseudonyms.⁴⁶ It was only late in the nineteenth century when authors began printing their names on their works, but even this was not a standard practice. Among the authors published by Martinez, apparently only the following were known and consequently identified in the covers or title pages of their books: Francisco Baltazar (Balagtas), Lucio Caran, Esteban Castilo, Roman de los Angeles, Juan Dilag, Cleto R. Ignacio, Honorio M. Lopez, Nemesio Magboo, Joaquin Mañibo, Jose Morante, Eulogio Julian Tindiana, and Joaquin Tuason. But these identities hardly provide any leads in the matter of Martinez's relationship with his authors. Most of them have slipped into obscurity, ignored by Tagalog literary history which has regarded the metrical romance as a low form unworthy of being considered as

⁴⁴ 'Martinez', *DPB*, I, p. 277.

⁴⁵ Martinez', *DPB*, I, p. 277.

⁴⁶ pp. xxi-xxiii.

legitimate literature. Balagtas (1788-1862) is unique for having volumes written about his life and works, but this is because he was made a Filipino hero and his romance *Florante at Laura* (1838) was determined as an important part of Philippine heritage. By the time Martinez published *Florante at Laura* (the first edition is of undetermined date but reprints were issued in 1909, 1913, 1919, 1927), Balagtas had long been deceased and his text considered as public property already. Of the other authors, only Lopez, Magboo, and Tuason can now be traced. The sources on Lopez and Magboo are hardly informative, being mainly in the form of their published books; Tuason (1843-1908), who was a leading writer in his day, is included in the *DPB*.⁴⁷ Lopez and Magboo were still alive when Martinez published their works, but there are no records of their transactions. As for Tuason, Martinez's editions of his *Jose Vendido* and *Virgen ng Kapayapaan* (Virgin of Peace) do bear indications that there was some copyright arrangement between publisher and author or more likely his heirs. (Both editions are undated, but they were published evidently after 1925.) The title pages of both books declare that the texts were published with full permission ('Malaking pahintulot' in *Jose Vendido* and 'May lubós na kapahintulutan' in *Virgen ng Kapayapaan*); the copyright pages specify that Tuason maintained the ownership of the works. In the case of Tuason, as well as that of Lopez and Magboo, it may be supposed that Martinez secured the literary rights by observing the abovementioned practices that prevailed during the time. For all his other metrical romances—by the unknown or dead authors, whose works were in the public domain—Martinez claimed the copyright for himself. The copyright pages of such books declare the works as the real property ('aring tunay') of his establishment. In some books, he even added firm warnings, such as 'di maipapalimbág ng sino man kung walâ siyang pahintulot'

⁴⁷ 'Tuason, Joaquin', in *DPB*, I, pp. 461-8.

(cannot be reprinted by anyone without permission) in the second reprint of *Adan at Eva* (Adam and Eve, 1924).

Martinez's copyright claims and warnings, for all intents and purposes, meant little during the period before 1924. This is in light of a legal case brought before the Philippine Supreme Court in 1911, appealing the ruling of the Court of First Instance of Manila. The case involved Yam Tung Way, alias Nam Sing, who was charged by government prosecutors with the crime of *defraudacion de propiedad literaria* (fraud or infringement of literary rights or property) for 'feloniously, fraudulently and without authority' copying, printing, and reproducing then selling and distributing a pamphlet entitled 'Reduction Table', containing tables of comparative values of weights and measures in the metric and the imperial (English) systems. Ruling in favour of Yam Tung Way, the trial court dismissed the case and discharged the defendant 'on the ground that no copyright law exists in the Philippine Islands'. The Supreme Court, in turn, upheld the ruling of the trial court and dismissed the appeal.⁴⁸ It is important to point out, however, that the matter of copyright was not unknown in the Philippines during the early twentieth century, or even the previous one for that matter, for the Spanish colonial government had issued decrees on copyright. In 1924, the American administration passed their own law—Act No. 3134, An Act to Protect Intellectual Property or the Copyright Law of the Philippine Islands, patterned after the US Copyright Law of 1909.

Martinez died in 1934. His children Roberto and Juliana took over the business but could not sustain it for long. The Imprenta, Libreria at Papeleria ni J. Martinez had had its day. Roberto set up his own printing press in 1941. Juliana carried on the publishing and bookselling activities of her father's firm in a smaller scale and under a

⁴⁸ 'The United States v. Yam Tung Way, alias Nam Sing, Republic of the Philippines Supreme Court G.R. No. L-6217 (8 December 1911)', *The Lawphil Project – Arellano Law Foundation* <http://www.lawphil.net/judjuris/juri1911/dec1911/gr_l-6217_1911.html> [accessed 15 December 2004].

new name, 'Aklatan ni Gng. Juliana Martinez' (Bookshop of Mrs. Juliana Martinez). She continued publishing metrical romances in Tagalog, already in new revised editions, and in Kapampangan. Her business lasted until the late 1950s.

The publishing of metrical romances was an ideal venture for Juan Martinez and other publishers of Philippine literature during the early twentieth century. It involved practically no difficulty in finding material and no expense in acquiring such, for there was a great body of nineteenth-century texts already in the public domain. Obtaining texts protected by copyright also entailed minor costs, for authors at that time 'were not so much concerned with getting decent royalties as seeing their names in print'.⁴⁹ Publishing romances required minimal investment in printing, for the texts were short and simple. And it offered the guarantee of profit, for there was a strong and steady public demand for metrical romances.

The *awits* and *corridos* were old favourites with which the Filipino people were not quite ready or inclined to part. They were embedded in the habits and customs of the nation. As Fansler noted in 1916:

These stories not only make up the body of most of the entertaining reading of the lower and middle classes, but they also furnish passages for quotation and recitation on every conceivable occasion. The lives of such heroes as Jaime del Prado and Bernardo del Carpio are sung by the small boy driving the cattle to pasture, by the peasant working in his paddy-field, or by the itinerant beggar travelling from one town *fiesta* to the next. Even in social gatherings the apt introduction into conversation of moralizing or didactic line from some well-known *corrido* is received with approbation. In the *duplo*, or wit-combat often

⁴⁹ 'Martinez', *DPB*, I, p. 277.

indulged in at funeral feasts, the winner is always the person who has at his tongue's end quotations from the "Pasion" and the *corridos*, that are the most appropriate for carrying on the argument proposed.⁵⁰

Moreover, the stories of the romances were dramatised in the *moro-moro* plays, which were an indispensable part of every fiesta, the annual festival observed by each town in commemoration of its patron saint.⁵¹

The metrical romances were sources of amusement and diversion, providing audiences with a respite from the tedium and adversities of everyday existence. They featured romantic love, fantasy, and happy endings. These were elements that the public valued and cherished in literature as ingrained in them by the literary tradition of the Spanish colonial period, in large part by the romances themselves. One other important element that contributed to the mass appeal of the romances was didacticism. As Eugenio notes, they were 'written primarily for a didactic purpose and only secondarily for entertainment.... In the author's view, a romance can be good and give pleasure only when it effectively conveys the moral lesson it is meant to impart'.⁵² This notion on the moral and social function of literature was likewise conditioned in authors and readers by literary tradition, which was dominated by religious writings. The romances then were also sources of religious and moral instruction, particularly for the less educated. They animated Christian doctrine by presenting models of devotion and service to God, filial piety, constancy and fidelity in love, among others. Their fairy-tale conclusions—good defeats evil, injustice is set

⁵⁰ pp. 204-5.

⁵¹ Fansler, p. 205. The *moro-moro* (or *komedya*) is a verse play in quatrains, written in the vernacular languages. Its basic plot involves a Christian princess falling in love with a Muslim ('Moro') prince and/or a Christian prince with a Muslim princess. *Moro-moro* performances during fiestas lasted three to five hours for three to five or seven or thirty days. Doreen G. Fernandez, 'Introduction: A Historical Survey of Philippine Theater,' in *Palabas: Essays on Philippine Theater History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1996), pp. 2-26 (p. 8).

⁵² p. xxxiv.

right, suffering is ended and rewarded—encouraged belief and hope in the salvation promised to the faithful if not in this life then in the next. The romances affirmed the practice of the Catholic faith albeit in simplistic terms. For instance, they often tended ‘to reduce religion to a simple matter of praying and waiting for a miracle to happen’.⁵³ But then, this view of religion in the romances coincided with actual popular practice, which was characterised by deep superstitions and formal rituals derived from the intermingling of Christianity and indigenous pagan beliefs.

The romances offered the comforts and pleasures found in the familiar: they were stories that many generations grew up with, and they were in languages that were the people’s own. They were also distinctly Filipino in some aspects, for while they retained essential features of their foreign models, such as plots, characters, and settings, the Philippine romances had taken on a uniquely local colouring.⁵⁴ Adaptations and alterations came in a number of forms, according to Eugenio: The portrayal of village life and the celebrations of feasts, for instance, conformed more to the Philippine experience than that of the countries where the stories were set. Then, many romances were altered according to local customs and moral standards, particularly in the matters of courtship, marriage, and religious practice. The fondness of Filipinos for allegorical and figurative language also manifests itself in the romances. Finally, some romances even had local sites, such as specific Philippine mountains, included in their settings.⁵⁵

⁵³ Eugenio, p. xxxiv.

⁵⁴ Resil B. Mojares explains that what took place in the tradition of Philippine romances was ‘not just a passive imitation of foreign models but a creative interaction between folk tradition and imported romances, on one hand, and between the romance tradition and the changing social experiences, on the other’. *Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel: A Generic Study of the Novel Until 1940*, 2nd edn (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press), p. 69.

⁵⁵ Eugenio, pp. xxxvi-xxxviii.

The metrical romances were part of the national heritage of the Philippines. In the early twentieth century, they were popular means of preserving the past and coping with the present, when radical changes were being instituted by a new foreign power. Beginning in 1901, for example, public schools were set up throughout the country by the American government. Filipinos were introduced to a system of education that was administered by foreigners who were not clerics (American teachers) and that used an unfamiliar language as the medium of instruction (English). This must have been strange if not suspicious or terrifying for the masses, generations of whom acquired whatever education they could from parochial schools and were hardly taught the language of the Spanish colonizers. Indeed, the American public schools were initially met by resistance, with parents forbidding their children from attending classes.⁵⁶

The interest in and demand for metrical romances during the early years of the twentieth century is related also to the stirring of nationalist sentiments among Filipinos at that time. The American administration prohibited the advocacy of independence or separation of the Philippines from the US (Sedition Law, 1901), forbade the display of the Filipino flag (Flag Law, 1907), and established English as the official language of the nation (1906). In the face of such policies, Philippine nationalism manifested itself in the celebration of local languages and literatures. Many newspapers and all sorts of books in the vernacular languages appeared in the market and found a receptive audience. Filipino journalists, critics, and scholars praised and promoted the literary tradition of the nation, particularly literature in Tagalog. As Vicente L. Rafael notes, it was precisely during the first decade of American colonial rule that the Philippines witnessed 'a flowering of vernacular

⁵⁶ See *Bearers of Benevolence: The Thomasites and Public Education in the Philippines*, ed. by Mary Racelis and Judy Ick (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, 2001), a lively anthology of recollections, accounts, and documents on the institution of American public education in the Philippines.

literature, especially novels, poetry, and dramas framed by anticolonial, proindependence sentiments'.⁵⁷ This development was marked by the emergence of new writings alongside the re-publication of old texts. As Martinez's case displays, the romances figured significantly in the latter aspect; to a large extent, they made up the traditional literature that was being celebrated. While the romances were generally apolitical in nature, they were regarded as expressions of Filipino creativity, talent, and identity. As such, they may have served nationalist or political interests. In some cases, their relevance to the resistance to American colonialism is more obvious and certain. *Florante at Laura* and *José Rizal*, for instance, were the most popular among Martinez's many titles, and this was by no mere coincidence. *Florante at Laura* was considered the best poem in the Tagalog language; it had been read since the late nineteenth century as a political allegory depicting the sufferings of the Filipino people under the oppressive Spanish regime. Jose Rizal, whose novels inspired the revolution against Spain, was revered as a national martyr; he was 'the Father of Filipino Patriotism'. Tied as they were to the colonial past of the nation, the stories on the lives of Florante and Laura and of Rizal must have been especially significant and inspiring to Filipinos who had to live once again under the rule of foreigners. Other romances may have had a similar appeal to and effect on readers, such as the *awits* on the lives of the Filipino priests Jose Burgos, Mariano Gomez, and Jacinto Zamora, who were unjustly accused as agitators of the mutiny against the Spaniards in 1872; or on the legendary Spanish hero Bernardo Carpio, who was one of the favourite characters of nineteenth-century audiences, was adopted as a local folk hero, and became a symbolic figure of freedom for Filipino revolutionaries in 1896.

⁵⁷ 'Anticipating Nationhood: Identification, Collaboration, and Rumor in Filipino Responses to Japan', in *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), pp. 103-21, 246-8 (p. 247).

Metrical romances appealed to the literary, cultural, and nationalistic sensibilities of Filipinos during the early twentieth century. They were popular publications indeed, but they were not the only writings in the vernacular languages that enjoyed the favour and patronage of mass audiences. Novenas and novels, especially in Tagalog, were also widely circulated and read. However, a close examination of these other publications reveals that while novenas and novels each occupied an important place in the Philippine publishing landscape during the early decades of the century, metrical romances maintained a special position as the leading literary books of the period.

The novena is a nine-day prayer sequence, usually addressed to a saint whose intervention is sought for a special intention. Novenas began to be printed in the Philippines in the seventeenth century.⁵⁸ The prayers attracted such an immense and intense following that their regular if not constant recitation came to form an intrinsic part of Catholic practice in the Philippines, which to this day is still observed with great fervour. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, novenas in many vernacular languages were published in massive numbers. They were printed in book form typically of sextodecimo size (around 12.5 x 9.5 cm), ranging from 16 to 48 pages, in newsprint. The publications often included a brief account on the life of the saint to whom the prayers are addressed and a hymn of praise (*gozo*). In the early twentieth century, printers and publishers maintained the prolific output of novenas, and booksellers made them accessible to the public. Martinez, for example, kept novenas in stock and in print throughout the existence of his bookshops and his

⁵⁸ The earliest novena printed in the Philippines appears to be *Relacion del novenario, y rogativa que se hizo en el Sancta Iglesia Cathedral de Manila, al Glorioso Archangel S. Miguel patron escogido para la Guerra que intento hazer contra estas islas el sangley Cogcem*, written by Jose Millan de Poblete in Spanish, published in Manila in 1663. It is followed by *Dolores de la Virgen, con su novena* by Pedro de Silva, S.J., published in Manila in the 1690s. The second title was written in Tagalog, which makes it the first published novena in a Philippine vernacular language. See Regalado Trota Jose, *Impreso: Philippine Imprints 1593-1811* (Makati: Fundación Santiago and Ayala Foundation, 1993), pp. 67, 88.

printing press. Bartlett noted in 1936 that the novenas were the most common printed matter in the Philippines. He found them to be the most 'uninteresting things in vernacular literature, miserably printed little pamphlets, some of them of almost microscopic size'.⁵⁹

It is interesting to note that nineteenth-century metrical romances were produced typically in the same size as the novenas. The change in dimension of the romance books likely took place some time during the turn of the century, for twentieth-century romances were already of a larger format. Martinez, for one, printed his romances in octavo size and his novenas in sextodecimo size (14.5 x 10 cm). The difference in dimensions of the novena and the romance is significant for the impressions they created and the functions they allowed their texts to serve. One kind of publication became readily distinguishable from the other, particularly in the case of texts dealing with the lives of saints and other religious subject matters. The novena remained in a size that made it convenient to be slipped inside Bibles or missals used for worship or to be carried everywhere, tucked in pockets or purses, as a sort of amulet or talisman. The romance, conforming to a standard size of trade publications, became more distinct as a book—as material for private or public reading, as an object to own and keep for one's self or share with others, as an item to include in personal or general libraries. The romance in octavo format lost none of its portability; moreover, it was less likely to be misplaced and more suitable to be passed on among several readers in its larger, sturdier size.

Novenas have sold in high numbers year-in, year-out throughout most of the history of publishing in the Philippines. The publications may well stand as the all-time bestsellers in the country. But, given the length of their texts and the number of

⁵⁹ p. 221.

their pages, novenas are not books in the technical sense: they are pamphlets.⁶⁰ They also were written expressly and have been read exclusively for devotional purposes; they are functional rather than artistic (or literary) texts. Philippine literary scholars have regarded novenas much in the same manner as Bartlett did and generally have ignored them. While this study does not discount the importance of novenas in the history of the printing and publishing in the Philippines, it is primarily concerned with trade publications (consumer books) offering leisure and entertainment. The novenas, as pamphlets of devotional literature, do not fall under such a category.

Novels, on the other hand, most certainly do. Tagalog novels began appearing as serials in newspapers in 1899 and as full-length books in 1905. During the early twentieth century, there was a surge in the production of such works of fiction in Tagalog and also in other vernacular languages. The literary activity from 1905 to 1921 was so vibrant and prolific that the period has come to be known as the 'Golden Age' of the Tagalog novel in Philippine literary history.

The novel emerged in the Philippines at an extraordinary point in history, when the nation was undergoing tremendous changes brought about by the passing of time between two centuries and by the shift in governance between two colonial powers with extremely different policies and mentalities. The Philippine novel grew out of the political, social, and intellectual conditions of the time: the awakening of national consciousness engendered by the revolution against Spain; the spread of secular values attendant to the collapse of Spanish rule and the influence of American occupation; the intellectual ferment created by the freedom in publishing, circulation of books, and spread of education; the emergence of a sizeable reading public; and the climate

⁶⁰ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the pamphlet as 'a small booklet or leaflet containing information or arguments about a single subject'. A pamphlet has fewer pages than a book, which is made up of at least 48 pages according to the standards set by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).

of great change that impelled many to write and more to read.⁶¹ The first two decades of the twentieth century, too, was a period when the vernacular languages flourished as the medium of literary expression, for the use of Spanish, limited as it was to the educated classes, was already in decline while fluency in English was still in the process of being developed.⁶² It was in this environment that Filipino writers took inspiration from foreign works of fiction, which were finally allowed to enter and circulate in the Philippines. The writers, many of whom were printers and journalists, tried their hand at the 'new' genre and became the early novelists of the nation.⁶³

The writers of the early novels, as Resil B. Mojares notes, had roots deep in the native tradition of the romances, the *pasyon*, and the *duplo*: 'They were either practitioners of these forms or from a family background of native literati whose artistic impulses were shaped by these popular forms'.⁶⁴ They carried on into their new writings the elements that dominated in the old works, particularly the romances. Thus many of the novels of the early twentieth century turned out to be love stories with moral lessons and happy endings. The only difference between the novel and the romance at that time, as the novelist Iñigo Ed. Regalado saw it, was that one form was in prose and the other in verse.⁶⁵ To a certain degree, the novel evolved from the romance. But the new fiction also arose as a reaction against the tradition of the old verses, which had begun to be viewed as dated and unsophisticated by the younger

⁶¹ Mojares, pp. 246-7.

⁶² Mojares, p. 247.

⁶³ Mojares, p. 172.

⁶⁴ p. 172.

⁶⁵ *Ang Pagkaunlad ng Nobelang Tagalog* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1939), p. 6.

generation, especially those from urban areas.⁶⁶ The writers among them found an alternative to the romance in the form of the novel.

The novel in serial form thrived in the market alongside the metrical romance. The early serialised novels enjoyed such an immense popularity that readers bought the newspapers mainly for the fiction rather than the news.⁶⁷ When the weekly magazines began appearing in the 1920s, they sold briskly too, primarily because they featured novels and secondly because they carried comic strips, for which the public was developing a great liking.⁶⁸ This led to the proliferation of magazines throughout the country and the increased production of novels.

In book form, the novels competed with the romances for the attention of the reading (and buying) public. The novels were produced in octavo size, in newsprint, and in paperback binding. They were generally issued in editions of 10,000 to 15,000 copies.⁶⁹ Like the romances, the novels were sold in bookshops and by church, market, and sidewalk vendors around Manila and in the provinces. The price of the novels ranged from twenty to sixty centavos (P0.20-0.60). (A few titles appeared in two or three volumes each and cost from P0.80 to 1.80 per title.)⁷⁰ In terms of physical appearance, output, distribution, and price then, the novels more or less matched the romances. But in other aspects, the novels lagged behind.

⁶⁶ Mojares, pp. 173-4.

⁶⁷ Regalado, p. 13.

⁶⁸ Jose Esperanza Cruz, 'Malaki ang Naitulong ng mga Lingguhang Tagalog sa Paglilinang at Pagpapalaganap ng Wikang Pambansa', in *Sampaksan ng mga Nobelistang Tagalog: Mga Panayam Tungkol sa Nobelang Tagalog na Binigkas Noong Abril 11, 1969* (Quezon City: Ang Aklatan, Unibersidad ng Pilipinas, 1974), pp. 38-44 (p. 40).

⁶⁹ Regalado, p. 18.

⁷⁰ The figures are taken from the advertisement in Martinez's edition of the novel *Madaling-Araw* (Early Morning) by Iñigo Ed. Regalado (1909).

Publishers were less interested in investing in novels, for the genre was still new to Filipino readers and had no tradition yet that could serve as a guarantee for book sales.⁷¹ Martinez, for instance, seems to have been particularly wary about publishing novels: he produced only six titles during his entire career. It was a measly output in itself but appears even more so in comparison with Sayo's sixty-three titles, published from 1912 to 1938, which is neither an outstanding number. The caution with which publishers regarded novels is reflected also by the fact that many authors took it upon themselves to arrange and pay for the printing of their texts. They then placed their novels in bookshops such as Martinez's and Sayo's and also sold copies themselves. Some authors even travelled from town to town in order to secure more sales, as in the case of Antonio G. Sempio.⁷²

The early books, as the novelist Faustino Aguilar put it, did not sell like hotcakes.⁷³ If one were to consider the number of titles that saw reprinting after the first edition as an indication of the commercial success of the novel in book form, the evidence suggests a dismal performance. Of the 328 novels published from 1903 to 1938, only eight titles were issued in second reprint, three in third reprint, and one in fourth reprint.⁷⁴ Of the first editions themselves, Aguilar paints a grim picture: Many copies ended up as wrapping paper in Chinese shops, as commodities sold along with rusty metal scraps, screws, and nails in junk shops, or as bargain items sold by publishers to clear their stockrooms. For many novels, the best that fate had in store was a space in the baskets of church vendors. The books were peddled together with scapulars,

⁷¹ Faustino Aguilar, *Ang Nobelang Tagalog: Kahapon, Ngayón at Bukas* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1949), p. 6.

⁷² Ligaya D. Perez, 'Ang Mga Mambabasa ng Nobelang Tagalog', in *Sampaksan ng mga Nobelistang Tagalog*, pp. 82-7 (p. 85). Sempio authored eighteen novels published within the period from 1919 to 1937.

⁷³ p. 7.

⁷⁴ See 'Talàan ng Mga Nobelang Tagalog', in Regalado, pp. 30-46.

beads, candles, and wax figures of human ears, eyes, and bodies. Sometimes the wax ears would all have been bought already, same too with most of the wax eyes, but the novels still remained unsold.⁷⁵

Novels were undoubtedly popular during the early twentieth century, but as commodities, they flourished less as books than as serials in newspapers or magazines. The periodicals were cheaper than books, typically costing ten centavos (P0.10) per issue, and they offered more value for the money of the masses. They served primarily as reading materials and thus satisfied public hunger for serial novels, comic strips, and other writings. Then, they were useful and valuable as scrap paper with which vendors could wrap their wares or which could be sold to junk shops for some extra income. The success of the Tagalog weekly *Liwayway* (Dawn), which began publication in 1922, is telling of the popularity of novels in serial form: it took only a few years for the weekly's initial circulation of 3000 copies to rise to 80,000.⁷⁶ Since *Liwayway*'s appearance in the market, along with the establishment of other weeklies in the vernacular languages, novelists sought to be published in magazines rather than in books. The magazines offered the authors what the books could not: a guaranteed income and wide readership for their efforts and, when film producers started turning to the weeklies for script material beginning in the late 1920s, a potential windfall from the sale of movie rights.

⁷⁵ 'Hindi ngâ agâd ay naging *kakaning mabili* ang mga unang nobelang násulat dito sa atin. May mga natapos sa pagiging balutan sa tindahan ng intsik at mayroón pang kayâ lamang mátagpuán, sakaling may nakákapitang maminsan-minsan na bumasa, ay sa mga tindahan ng maglulumâ hinahánap, pagka't doón, kasama ng mga lumâ at kálawanging putúl-putól na bakal, kahalò ng mga turnilyo at pakò, ay may iláng salin ng mga nobelang ipinagbili na ng mga limbagan nang patapón upáng huwág makasikíp sa kaniláng kinalalagyán. Pinakamataás nang kapalaran ng karamihan sa mga nobelang násulat noón ... ay ang magíng bantay sa mga pintò ng simbahan kung may ipinagdíriwang na pintakasi, nangakalagáy sa isáng bilao na kung minsá'y kasama ng mga kalmén at kuwintas o ng kandilâ kayâ, tainga, matâ o katawáng buo namán ng tao na yari sa pagkit. Kung minsá'y nauubos na ang lahát ng tainga, nâbili na rin ang karamihang matâ at ang *nobela* na alinmán sa mga pángunahíng aking binanggit ay naroón pa ring nagpáparangalan ngâ ng kanyáng magandáng pamagát at ng pangalan namán ng makisig na sumulat, nguni't hindi mábili at hindi man lamang mábatì'. p. 7.

⁷⁶ Cruz, 'Malaki ang Naitulong ng mga Lingguhang Tagalog', p. 39.

In the Philippine book trade of the early twentieth century, metrical romances evidently fared better as commercial and cultural products than novels. There was a greater demand for romances. And, as displayed by the case of Martinez, who published numerous titles and reprinted many of them often, the books sold in larger numbers. The romances better served the needs and interests of the people at that time. They were cheap; they were entertaining as well as instructional; they were familiar and traditional. The romances were part of the life and culture of the nation while the novel had yet to establish itself as such. During the period from the 1900s to the 1920s, the romances were the most popular literary books in the Philippines. They were the bestsellers of the time.

But bestsellers are by nature ephemeral. As John Sutherland describes them, 'Bestsellers fit their cultural moment as neatly as a well-fitting glove. And, typically, no other moment'.⁷⁷ So did the metrical romances of the Philippines during the early decades of the twentieth century. They appealed to the imagination and the condition of the Filipino people during a period of transition. When that moment had passed, when American colonization had practically steered the Philippines away from its Spanish heritage and had all but changed the face of the nation, the romances not only lost their popularity but also came to be condemned. In a speech delivered before an assembly of teachers in 1920, Pardo de Tavera denounced the romances as 'all lengthy, exaggerated, puerile, and absurd in the extreme'.⁷⁸ He articulated an opinion that would be shared by a new generation of Filipinos, one that had come of age in the 1920s. They were fluent in English, Western-orientated, and alienated from the native heritage; they were not interested in the romances.

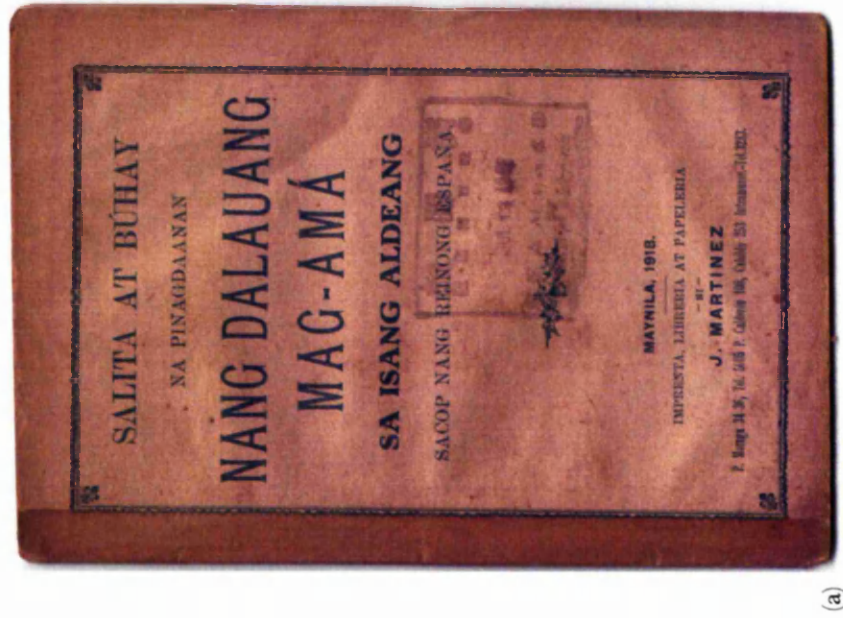
⁷⁷ *Reading the Decades: Fifty Years of the Nation's Bestselling Books* (London: BBC, 2002), p. 7.

⁷⁸ p. 5.

By the 1930s, metrical romances were already languishing as commodities. Bartlett observed then that big bundles of some of the later editions remained unsold.⁷⁹ Even years later, a portion of Martinez's stock was apparently still in bookshops or perhaps in storage. Some surviving copies of his romances bear the stamp of the Office of the Japanese Military Administration, dated 13 July 1943, indicating that the materials had passed the examination of the state censors (FIGURE 19). The stamps on the books also reveal that the copies were still available and still had not been purchased up to that time.

While metrical romances had fallen out of the mainstream, the genre did not altogether disappear from the literary and publishing scene. A few new titles still appeared in the 1940s. The old titles continued to be reprinted and issued in new editions in Tagalog until the 1950s and in other vernacular languages until the 1960s. However, by then, the romance was no more than a relic from the past. Its shelf life as a bestseller had long expired.

⁷⁹ p. 221.



(a)



(b)

FIGURE 19. Front covers of (a) *Salita at buhay na pinagdaanan nang dalauang mag-amá sa isang aldeang sacop nang reinong España* (The Words and Life of Two Fathers and Sons in a Village under the Kingdom of Spain), published in 1918, and (b) *Ang marilag na Virgen nang Kapayapaan* (The Beautiful Virgin of Peace), published after 1925. The books bear the censorship stamp of the Office of the Japanese Military Administration, dated 13 July 1943. (Images reduced; reproduced from the copies of (a) the Damiana L. Eugenio Folklore Room, Department of English and Comparative Literature, University of the Philippines and (b) the School of Oriental and African Studies Library, University of London.)

CHAPTER FOUR

ENTERTAINMENT AFTER THE WAR

Aliwan (1945-1947) and the Tagalog novel

A peculiar little publication appeared in the newsstands of Manila in 1945 after the end of World War II. It was not a newspaper like most of the other publications that the printing presses of the time were churning out to satisfy and capitalise on the public hunger for news about the nation and the world. Neither was it a magazine, for it did not offer a variety of articles, stories, and other reading material in a single volume. Instead, it featured one complete short novel ('maikling nobela') in Tagalog, nothing else. The publication was a periodical named *Aliwan* (Entertainment), which came in the form of a small book. It was published intermittently at first, but the response to the initial issues was so enthusiastic that it consequently established itself as a weekly and later expanded in size and length to accommodate complete works of full-length fiction.

The publication is now all but forgotten. At best, some literary studies mention it in passing. Otherwise, if at all, it comes up only in footnotes or bibliographies of scholarly works. During the post-war period, however, *Aliwan* was a significant presence in the Philippine publishing scene. It was a bold and pioneering venture, for no other local commercial periodical had ever devoted itself exclusively to literature in Tagalog or in any other vernacular language for that matter. Furthermore, it was unique as a mass-produced serial that was dedicated to fiction and that was published

in book form. It remains as the only one of its kind in the history of Philippine literature and publishing. In its day, *Aliwan* provided audiences with an accessible and regular source of fiction. For Tagalog writers, it offered an outlet that was constant and came with the guarantee of circulation and readership. *Aliwan* was a popular publication during the early post-war period and stands well as a literary bestseller of the time. It deserves revisiting. The case of *Aliwan* offers a perspective on the conditions and circumstances of literary publishing in the Philippines after World War II, a crucial period in the history of the nation. It has much to tell specifically about the publishing history of Tagalog novels both as serials in periodicals and as books.

The publication of *Aliwan* came in the wake of the termination of the Japanese Occupation (1942-1945) in the Philippines. Its first issue featured material that could not have been more suited to the times: a love story entitled 'Bagong Buhay' (New Life), written by Susana de Guzman, about a young couple whose lives are interrupted by World War II. The narrative opens with the engagement party of the lovers on 7 December 1941, the date of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and ends with their marriage on 4 July 1945, the official date of the liberation of the Philippines from the Japanese forces. The issue appeared in July 1945, probably some time in the middle of the month.¹ It bore no date of publication, as would the next few succeeding issues.

At the onset, *Aliwan* seemed to be a tentative project, with no fixed schedule of appearance. All its first issue indicates is that the publication would be issued from time to time ('tuwituwina') and would feature selected novels and other reading materials for the entertainment and amusement of the readers.² *Aliwan* emerged at a

¹ The second issue of *Aliwan* was published also in July and the third in August, as evidenced by an advertisement for the third number that appeared in the 6 August 1945 issue of the magazine *Liwayway*.

² 'Ang aming layunin', *Aliwan* 1, 1945, p. 2.

point when the rehabilitation of the Philippines from the war had barely begun. The damage done to the nation was, as the historian Teodoro A. Agoncillo describes it, incalculable.³ Manila, for example, which American forces had bombed, shelled, and burned to liberate from the Japanese, was left with no district undamaged, with most of its historical structures and government buildings in ruins, and with an estimated 100,000 Filipino civilians dead.⁴ The destruction of property throughout the country brought about by the war severely debilitated the national economy. Practically all industries suffered great losses and were hard-pressed to recover. In order to operate, like most other trades, the publishing industry had to contend with machinery that needed replacement or repair and with materials that came in limited supply and high prices. As for *Aliwan*, it evidently made do with whatever resources available. The covers of the early issues, for instance, were made from paper scraps. The constraints of the times possibly had something to do as well with the size and length of the publication. *Aliwan* was published as a chapbook.⁵ It measured 15.5 x 12 cm, had book paper covers, and contained 50 pages (inclusive of front and back covers) in newsprint. Its front cover was fully illustrated in three colours (FIGURE 20); its back cover carried blurbs for the publication and brief previews of the contents of the next issue. Its text was set in double columns and, in some issues, complemented by a few small illustrations (FIGURE 21). As a whole, it was a fairly austere production.

Behind the publishing of *Aliwan* was a newly founded literary publishing firm called Palimbagang Tagumpay (Victory Publishing). Among its owners was Ramon Rocas, whose family was one of the most prominent in Philippine society and one of the

³ *The History of the Filipino People*, 8th edn (Quezon City: Garotech Publishing, 1990), p. 427.

⁴ Alfonso J. Aluit, *By Sword and Fire: The Destruction of Manila in World War II 3 February-3 March 1945*, 2nd edn (Makati City: Bookmark, 1995), p. 405.

⁵ John Carter describes chapbooks as 'Small pamphlets of popular, sensational, juvenile, moral or educational character, originally distributed by chapmen or hawkers, not by booksellers', in *ABC For Book Collectors*, rev. by Nicolas Barker, 7th edn (London: Werner Shaw, 1994), p. 61.

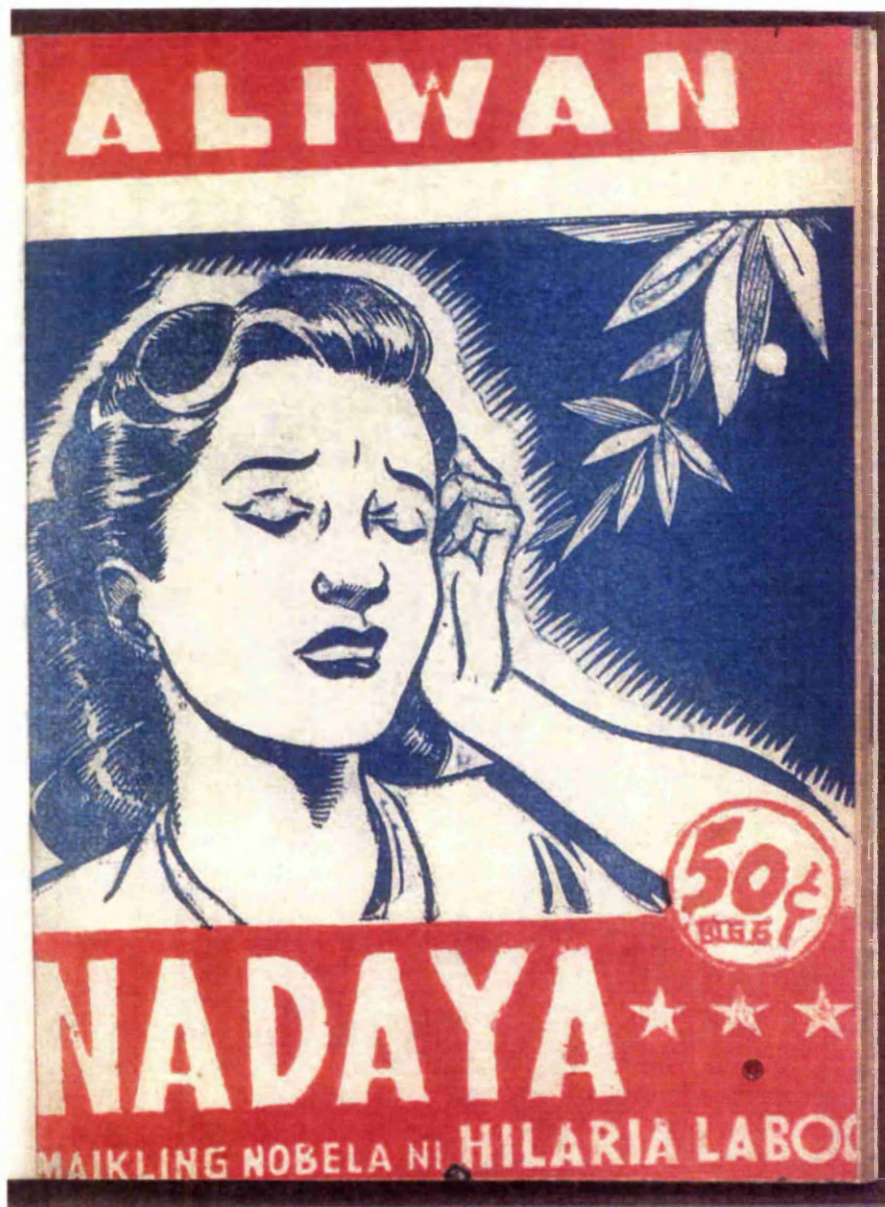


FIGURE 20. Front cover of the sixth issue of *Aliwan*, featuring the short novel 'Nadaya' (Cheated) by Hilaria Labog, published in August or September 1945.

(Image in actual size, with edges cropped for binding; reproduced from the copy of the School of Oriental and African Studies Library, University of London.)

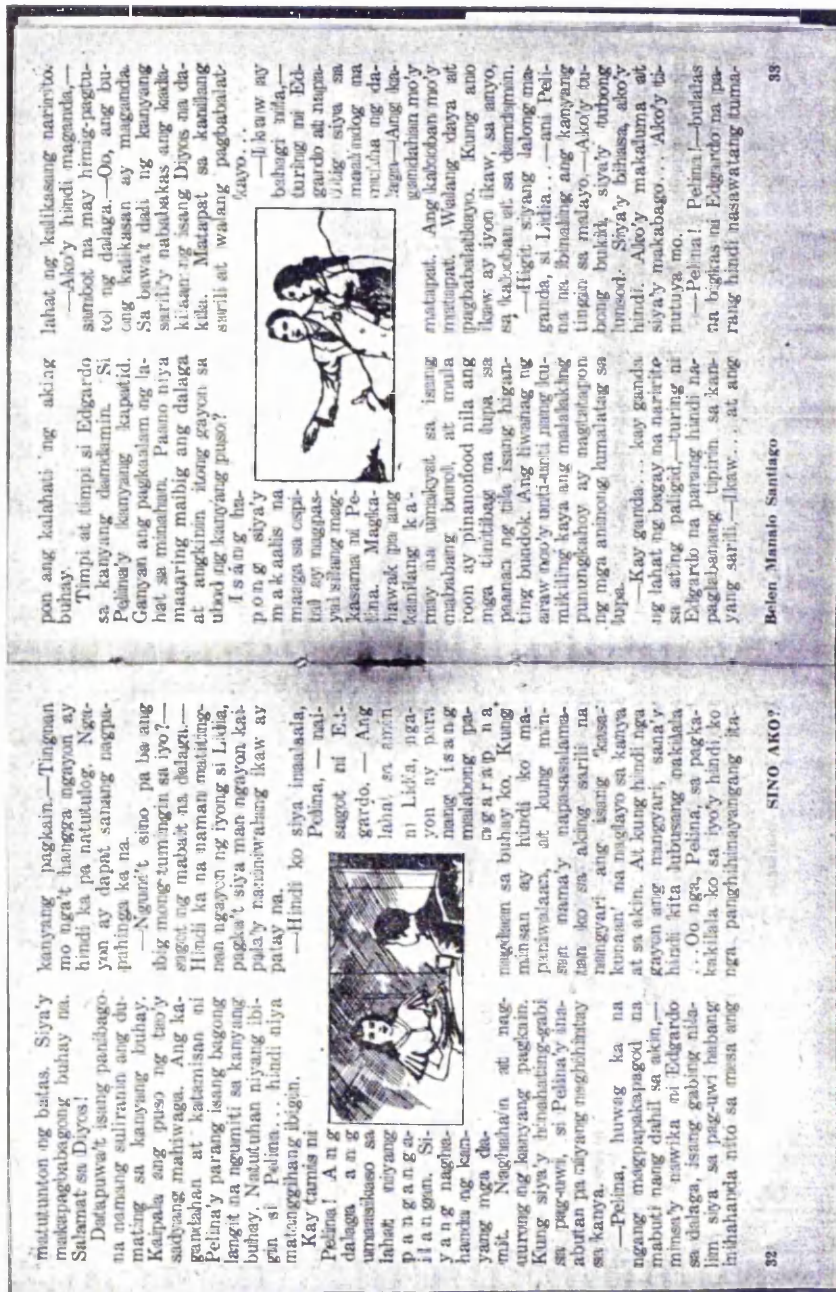


FIGURE 21. Pages from the 18th issue of *Aliwan*, featuring 'Sino Ako?' (Who Am I?) by Belen Manalo Santiago, published on 17 December 1945.

(Image reduced and rendered in black and white; reproduced from the copy of the School of Oriental and African Studies Library, University of London.)

major forces in the publishing industry. The Roces family had been in the newspaper business since the second decade of the twentieth century. Its patriarch Alejandro Roces Sr established an enterprise known as TVT after its chain of dailies, *The Tribune* (in English), *La Vanguardia* (Spanish), and *Taliba* (Tagalog). Ramon, the eldest son of Alejandro Sr, branched out into magazine publishing and set up his own chain under the company Ramon Roces Publications with the weekly magazines *Liwayway* (published in Tagalog, founded in 1922), *Graphic* (English, 1927), *Bisaya* (Cebuano, 1930), *Hiwaga* (Tagalog, 1931), *Hiligaynon* (Hiligaynon, 1934), *Bannawag* (Iloko, 1934), and *Bicolnon* (Bikol, 1938). *Liwayway* (Dawn) was the most popular among Roces's publications and indeed the most commercially successful magazine in the history of Philippine publishing. Only a few years after it was launched, it already ranked as the leading weekly in the country. By 1941, before the outbreak of World War II, *Liwayway*'s circulation was at 89,000.⁶ During the war, the press and all other media fell under the rigid control of the Japanese Military Administration. Following the invasion of Manila in January 1942, newspapers and periodicals were shut down by the Japanese or, in the case of the Roces publications, 'forcibly taken over, literally at the point of the bayonet'.⁷ The TVT chain and *Liwayway* were the only pre-war publications allowed to operate during the Japanese Occupation; they were placed under the management of the Manila Sinbunsya Corporation, which also published other Japanese-controlled newspapers and magazines. *Liwayway* re-appeared in the market as a bi-monthly in June 1942, as a tri-monthly in August, and then later as a weekly.⁸

⁶ Adriano P. Laudico, executive editor of *Liwayway* in the 1960s, quoted in John A. Lent, 'Magazines', in *Philippine Mass Communication* ([Manila]: Philippine Press Institute, [1967]), pp. 53-77 (p. 63).

⁷ D. H. Soriano and others, *The Roces Family Publishers (With a History of the Philippine Press)* ([Manila]: Islas Filipinas Publishing, 1987), p. 50.

After the Americans re-entered Manila on 3 February 1945, the Roces family regained ownership of their newspaper and magazine chains, as did other publishers their publications and presses or whatever was left of them. Many pre-war publishers lost their offices and printing plants entirely during the bombing of Manila. The facilities of the Roces publications were spared from total damage. With the advantage of having the only working rotary press in Manila, the family was quick to recover and claim leadership in the newspaper and magazine business.⁹ Ramon Roces was even able to offer printing assistance to the *Manila Daily Bulletin*, a former competitor of *The Tribune*.¹⁰ *Liwayway* came out with its first post-war issue on 23 April 1945. Its editor was Pedrito Reyes, who was also the editor of *Aliwan* and one of the owners of Palimbagang Tagumpay. Aside from Roces and Reyes, the other owners of the publishing firm were Renato Arevalo, Luis J. Reyes, Manuel Diaz, Antonio Peñaloza, and Benito Prieto. Diaz and Peñaloza were also part owners of Ramon Roces Publications; Prieto was the brother-in-law of Roces.

Palimbagang Tagumpay was established as an independent corporate entity. However, it was essentially bound to Ramon Roces Publications not only in terms of ownership, with individuals holding shares in both corporations, but also as far as operations were concerned. Palimbagang Tagumpay used the printing facilities and resources of the Roces corporation; the circulation of its publications was coursed

⁸ Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *The Fateful Years: Japan's Adventure in the Philippines, 1941-45*, vol 2, 2nd edn (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2001), p. 590.

⁹ Jose Luna Castro, 'Press', in *Philippine Mass Media in Perspective*, ed. by Gloria D. Feliciano and Crispulo J. Iban Jr (Quezon City: Capitol Publishing House, 1967), pp. 1-21 (p. 12). The TVT chain, however, ceased to exist as it did during the pre-war period. The *Tribune* was replaced by the *Manila Times*, which started publication in May 1945; *La Vanguardia* never re-opened; *Taliba* was replaced by *Pagsilang* (Birth), which was discontinued after one year of publication (Soriano, p. 50). Ramon Roces revived his magazines, started the afternoon daily *Evening News* on September 1945, and went on to launch other new periodicals.

¹⁰ Rosalinda Pineda-Ofreneo, *The Manipulated Press: A History of Philippine Journalism Since 1945*, 2nd edn (Metro Manila: Solar Publishing Corporation, 1986), p. 31.

through the agents of the Roces weeklies; its offices were located within the Roces compound on Soler Street in Manila. The literary publishing firm appears to have functioned, in effect, as a subsidiary of the magazine enterprise.

Palimbagang Tagumpay specialised in Tagalog literature, describing itself as a publisher of selected novels and other reading materials ('Lumilimbag ng mga piling nobela at iba't ibang babasahin'). It was an ambitious and daring undertaking regardless of the period when it was founded, when conditions were particularly difficult and dismal for the Filipino people. Literary publishing in the Philippines, even in the best of times, has always involved great risks due to the fact that the market is limited. Publishing literature is hardly a profitable business. Publishing literature exclusively seems altogether an altruistic if not a foolhardy venture. But Palimbagang Tagumpay apparently was undaunted by the challenges of the times and the risks in literary publishing. Perhaps this was because it could well afford to be so since the firm had access to the printing machinery and materials and the widespread distribution system of Ramon Roces Publications. More importantly, it had the support of the Roces wealth behind it. Nevertheless, Palimbagang Tagumpay displayed prudence in its affairs, evidently taking heed of the reality that Filipino readers were generally less interested in books than in periodicals or, more specifically, less able to afford the former and particularly so in such trying times. The firm published only three books: the novels *Fort Santiago* by Pedrito Reyes (published in 1945, reprinted in 1946) and *Anghel ng Kaligtasan* (Angel of Safety) by Adriano P. Laudico (1945), and the collection of poetry *Mga Hamak na Dakila: 60 Tula* (Lowly Heroes: 60 Poems) by Lope K. Santos (1945). The firm's main product was the periodical *Aliwan*.

Just as Palimbagang Tagumpay and Ramon Roces Publications were closely connected to each other, so too were *Aliwan* and *Liwayway*. Both publications fell under the editorial leadership of Pedrito Reyes, who had been with the *Liwayway* staff for thirty-five years before he ventured into publishing *Aliwan*.¹¹ In a sense, *Aliwan* was an offspring of *Liwayway*. During the early 1920s, weekly magazines in the vernacular languages started appearing and almost immediately became very popular among Filipinos. Of all the reading materials that the magazines offered, it was the serialised novels, novellas, and short stories that the public met with most enthusiasm. Fiction became the selling point of the weeklies. As the magazine with the largest circulation and with the most prominent if not the best writers in its roster, *Liwayway* played a pivotal role in fostering public interest in and demand for Tagalog fiction during the pre-war period. *Aliwan* fed on the market and tapped from the pool of talent that *Liwayway* had developed. It gave magazine readers a concentrated dose of what they had looked forward to before the war and continued to so do after. *Aliwan* offered only fiction and, moreover, fiction only in complete form rather than in serials and written only by the leading Tagalog writers. Its early issues list twenty individuals in the staff box as special assistants ('Mga Tanging Katulong'); they were writers who had made their reputations before the war by being published in *Liwayway*.¹²

Aliwan's exclusively literary nature set it apart from *Liwayway*. Although the post-war issues of *Liwayway* still featured fiction, the magazine had other fare to offer: personal essays, biographical articles, world news items, show business features,

¹¹ Pedrito Reyes, 'Ang Mga Naitulong ng mga Lingguhang Babasahin sa Pagpapalaganap ng Nobelang Tagalog', in *Sampaksaan ng mga Nobelistang Tagalog: Mga Panayam Tungkol sa Nobelang Tagalog na Binigkas Noong Abril 11, 1969* (Quezon City: Ang Aklatan, Unibersidad ng Pilipinas, 1974), pp. 45-50 (p. 49).

¹² The writers listed are Dr Fausto J. Galauran, Amado V. Hernandez, Susana de Guzman, Lazaro Francisco, Teofilo E. Sauco, Rosalia L. Aguinaldo, Hilaria Labog, Belen Manalo Santiago, Francisco M. Vasquez, Pedro Reyes Villanueva, Catalino V. Flores, Simeon P. Arcega, Mateo Cruz Cornelio, José Flores Sibal, Nieves Baens del Rosario, Carmen S. Herrera, Dr Gerardo de Leon, Aniceto F. Silvestre, Carlos Padilla, and Brigido C. Batungbakal.

illustrations and photographs, amusing anecdotes and jokes, and comic strips.

Portraits of beautiful foreign or local women often graced the covers of the magazine.

The cover model of its first post-war issue, for instance, was the Hollywood actress Joan Leslie. Sometimes, *Liwayway* also included pin-up posters in its issues, usually of some American female movie star or of some other Caucasian woman clad in a swimsuit.

Aside from offering fiction for the entertainment and amusement of their readers, *Aliwan* claimed another, higher purpose:

Bukod diyan, dahil sa kalupitang ito ñg digma na tumupok sa ating Aklatang Pambansa at sa sarisarili nating aklatan, ang kasaysayan ñg ating panitikan na bahagi rin ng kasaysayan ng ating lahi, ay nawalan ñg mahahalagang kasulatang katutunghan ñg mga susunod nating kabataan, ñg maniningning na gawa ñg mga nauna sa kanila, at upang makapag-ambag ñg kahi't na bahagyang lunas, ang matatanda nating nobela, tula, at iba pang basahing hindi natunghan ñg ating kabataan ay muling lilimbagin nitong "Aliwan" sa aklat na buo.¹³

(Due to the cruelty of the war, which burned our National Library and our own personal libraries, the history of our literature that is part as well of the history of our race has been dispossessed of valuable writings that could have served our future generations, of brilliant works made by those who came before them. To provide a slight remedy to this situation, *Aliwan* will reprint in book form our old novels, poems, and other reading materials that are unknown to our youth.)

¹³ 'Ang aming layunin', *Aliwan* 1, 1945, p. 2.

With such an aim behind the publishing of *Aliwan*, Palimbagang Tagumpay seems to have been indeed an altruistic venture as well as a nationalistic one, at least in some measure.

The first issue of *Aliwan* found a receptive and eager audience, and this encouraged Palimbagang Tagumpay to pursue the publication with greater effort and energy.¹⁴ The positive response to *Aliwan* is not surprising. Emerging from three years of oppression and repression under the Japanese administration, the Filipino public was starving not only for news about the nation and the world but also for fiction and other entertaining reading materials.¹⁵ While *Liwayway* and other periodicals did publish short novels and stories during the Japanese Occupation, people bought the magazines not to read them seriously but to use them as wrappers instead because paper happened to be a scarce commodity at the time.¹⁶ Fiction, as all other writings of the period, was produced under the strict censorship of the Japanese and thus kept to harmless themes far removed from the turbulent times. Writers could do little more than focus on and create quaint depictions of rural life, a subject matter that had been ignored by pre-war fiction.¹⁷ When it appeared after the war, *Aliwan* must have caused quite a stir, for it offered stories that came in the mould readers of pre-war magazines were accustomed to and delighted by, and that bore a relevance and immediacy they had missed for three years. In brief, it gave readers what they wanted. The short novel featured in the first issue of *Aliwan*, de Guzman's 'Bagong

¹⁴ 'Kami ay nagpapasalamat', *Aliwan* 2, 1945, p. 2.

¹⁵ Such was the public hunger for news at the time that the newspaper industry flourished almost immediately after the arrival of American forces in Manila, that 'even fly-by-night operators found it profitable to put out sidewalk papers'. Eventually, only a handful of papers survived. 'The major pre-war papers which had resumed publication quickly established foothold, crowding out the smaller post-war newspapers from their precarious position'. Castro, pp. 11-2.

¹⁶ Agoncillo, *The Fateful Years*, p. 589.

¹⁷ Agoncillo, *The Fateful Years*, p. 591.

Buhay', exemplifies the kind of fiction that appealed to audiences at that time. The narrative is straightforward; it is romantic, telling specifically of the triumph of love in the face of adversity; its main characters are well-off members of Manila society; it imparts moral lessons and values, and it ends happily. With the war years as its setting, the story depicts conditions and situations that readers knew all too well from firsthand experience: the turmoil and terror caused by the Japanese rule, the 'buy and sell' business (or the black market, which became a primary mode of trade and commerce during the occupation), the collaboration of Filipinos with the enemy, the guerrilla activities of Filipino soldiers. Furthermore, the story was written by a recognised author, one who had been a regular contributor to *Liwayway*, was a member of the prominent literary group Ilaw at Panitik (Light and Pen), and whose novels had been made into popular films. The material featured by the other initial issues of *Aliwan* generally fell along the same line as de Guzman's 'Bagong Buhay', with titles such as 'Iniibig Kita!' (I Love You!, by Belen Manalo Santiago, issue number 2) and 'Sa Landas ng Kaligayahan' (In the Path of Happiness, by Hilaria Labog, no. 16) or 'Ako'y Gerilyero: Mga Sariling Karanasan' (I Am a Guerrilla: Personal Experiences, by Carlos Padilla, no. 4) and 'Kapuwa Bayani' (Fellow Hero, by Narciso S. Asistio, no. 8). They were about romantic love or recent war experiences; they had didactic elements and happy endings; they were written by the reputable authors of the day.

On 5 October 1945, *Aliwan* issued its eighth number; thereafter, the publication appeared weekly, on Mondays. According to a contemporary account, people flocked to buy copies of the periodical despite its high price.¹⁸ *Aliwan* was sold at fifty centavos (P0.50) per issue. It was more expensive than copies of *Liwayway*, which were priced

¹⁸ Andrea Amor Tablan, 'Isang Masusing Pag-aaral sa Kasaysayan ng Nobelang Tagalog' (unpublished master's thesis, Centro Escolar University, 1948), p. 61.

at thirty centavos (P0.30) each, but less so than the novels published by Palimbagang Tagumpay, which cost two pesos (P2.00) per copy. At any price, periodicals and books for entertainment seem to have been luxury items at the time because the economy was unstable and poverty was widespread. There were opportunities for employment, created by the American army and the Philippine Civil Affairs Unit, which set daily wages for labourers at one peso (P1.00) with food or one peso and twenty centavos (P1.20) without food, and there was money in circulation.¹⁹

However, basic commodities were in great demand and consequently sold at high prices, which could not be checked even by the price control law issued by the government. For instance, according to the official rate, eggs cost thirty centavos (P0.30) each, but they were selling at seventy centavos (P0.70) apiece in the public markets.²⁰ In spite of such conditions, or perhaps because of them, people allowed themselves some luxury and sought reading materials for entertainment. Circulation figures reveal that there was a fairly lively market for such publications. *Liwayway*'s print run, for example, was at 30,210 copies per issue as of 25 June 1945.²¹ *Fort Santiago*, Reyes's novel based on actual events that took place in the Fort Santiago prison in Intramuros during the Japanese Occupation, was issued in an edition of 10,000 copies in 1945 and then another 20,000 in 1946.²² There is no data available on the circulation of *Aliwan* during its earlier years of publication, but it may be supposed that the figure was no more than that of *Liwayway* and no less than *Fort*

¹⁹ Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People*, p. 428.

²⁰ Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People*, p. 429.

²¹ Circulation figure as reported in the 'Sworn Statement' filed with the Bureau of Posts for the registration of the publication as second-class matter, reproduced in *Liwayway*, 23 July 1945.

²² As indicated in the title page of the 1946 reprint of the novel.

Santiago's first edition. By 31 March 1947, *Aliwan's* print run would be at 29,935 copies per issue.²³

The twenty-third issue of *Aliwan*, published on 28 January 1946, marked a new phase for the publication. The periodical took on some significant changes and appeared in the form of a typical local trade book albeit a rather thin one. *Aliwan* expanded in size to 21.59 x 15.24 cm (8½ x 6 in) and in length to 68 pages (inclusive of covers). Its front covers were printed in full colour (using four-colour process printing) and presented brighter, livelier pictures (FIGURE 22). Illustrations complementing the text also became a standard element. The periodical no longer limited itself to single titles per issue, perhaps because longer works of fiction were not regularly available given the frequency of the publication and the competition from other periodicals that also published novels. For instance, the issue with which *Aliwan* launched its new phase featured the short novel 'Ngipin sa Ngipin' (A Tooth for a Tooth) by Carlos Padilla and six short stories by various writers. Other issues followed this pattern, while some carried two short novels instead. When full-length novels were featured, though, they still appeared in their entirety in single issues and not in a series running through several issues. Occasionally, *Aliwan* also published short poems, but the verses seem to have served primarily as space fillers in between or at the end of the main texts in the same manner as did boxed announcements offering previews of succeeding issues or promoting the publication itself.

Some original features were retained in the new *Aliwan* format, such as its paper binding, newsprint pages, and text set in double columns. The circulation schedule and price also remained unchanged, as did the motivation behind the publishing of the periodical. *Aliwan* kept to its higher purpose. As the editors declare, the changes

²³ 'Sworn Statement', *Aliwan* 88, 28 April 1947, p. 126.



FIGURE 22. Front cover of the 114th issue of *Aliwan*, featuring 'Kung Umibig Ang Artista' (When An Actor Loves) by Juan Rivera Lazaro and 'Bulaklak na Papel' (Paper Flower) by Carlos Padilla, published on 27 October 1947.

(Image in actual size, with edges cropped for binding; reproduced from the copy of the School of Oriental and African Studies Library, University of London.)

were launched despite many obstacles because the publication aimed, above all, to serve the nation and the national language ('ang ganitong pagbabago'y ibinunsod na naming sa kabila ng maraming sagabal, sapagka't sa ibabaw ng lahat ay may hangarin kaming makapaglingkod sa Bayan at sa Wikang Sarili'). It intended to do so by continuing to offer material not only meant to entertain the readers but also to instruct them on valuable lessons in life and by convincing many more other people, especially the youth in schools, to read literary works in the national language.²⁴ The changes may have been motivated indeed by *Aliwan*'s ultimate goal, but this does not discount the possibility that there were commercial factors involved. *Aliwan*, after all, was a commodity: it had to survive in the market before it could accomplish any higher aim. Its evolution suggests that by January 1946 the periodical was more than merely surviving as a commercial product. It seems that it was performing rather well, perhaps even achieving some increase in sales. At the very least, *Aliwan* must have acquired a market position that was stable enough and that allowed for potential growth for the publishers to consider developing it as a product or, in other words, pouring more capital into it.

Within the year 1946, *Aliwan* evolved further. In May, its number of pages increased to 84 and soon after to 98. The periodical continued to describe itself in its publicity announcements thus: Each issue is a complete novel, written by the more famous novelists, printed in the form of a book to keep for a long time ('Bawa't labas ay isang buong nobela, sinulat ng lalong mga tanyag na nobelista, linimbag na kaayusan ng isang aklat na maiingatan ninyong panghabang panahon'). But it was a description that no longer held true. *Aliwan* began offering single complete novels less than combinations of two or more shorter pieces per issue. Some of these shorter

²⁴ 'Ang Aming Pagbabago', *Aliwan* 23, 28 January 1946, p. 2.

works were instalments of serialised novels. The periodical also started printing humorous comic strips on its inside covers and on its back cover, which replaced the short articles on moral values and good conduct previously featured. The cartoons became a fixed component of the publication and served as an added appeal for readers. Some *Aliwan* announcements bore the tagline 'May kasamang tatlong pahina ng komiks' (With three pages of comics), evidently meant to attract more readers. In December, *Aliwan* added more pages to its issues, with the total ranging from 126 to 132 pages. The publication also took on two significant projects. The first was a special issue, published on 16 December (no. 69), of 'Mga Kuwento ni Lola Basiang' (Stories of Grandmother Basiang), a compilation of the popular children's tales and stories by Severino Reyes, who was one of the foremost writers of the pre-war period and incidentally the father of *Aliwan* editor Pedrito. The special issue appeared as a 260-page book and cost one peso (P1.00) per copy. *Aliwan* would issue two other 'Lola Basiang' compilations of the same length and at the same price: the second book on 21 July 1947 (no. 100) and the third on 15 December 1947 (no. 127). The second project was the serialisation of Jose Rizal's novel *Noli Me Tangere*, which was valued for its crucial role in the history the Philippine nation yet still prohibited by certain Catholic educational institutions for its critical view of the clergy during the Spanish colonial period. Beginning in its 30 December 1946 issue (no. 71), *Aliwan* featured an adaptation of Rizal's novel in illustrated form or comic strips with instalments typically running to four pages per issue.

These changes and innovations reflect *Aliwan*'s efforts at securing its position in the market, one that was increasingly becoming crowded. In 1946, the magazines *Bituin* (Star), *Silahis* (Rays of the Sun), and *Paraluman* (Muse) were launched, joining the ranks of *Bulaklak* (Flower), *Ilang-Ilang* (Ylang-ylang), *Malaya* (Free), and *Sinag-Tala* (Starlight),

which had been in circulation since 1945. The magazines were all in Tagalog, and all published serialised novels or complete shorter fiction in each of their issues. *Ilang-Ilang* and *Bulaklak*, in particular, emerged as serious competitors of *Liwayway* that Ramon Roces was compelled to take on some extreme measures. He bought out *Ilang-Ilang* only to discontinue its publication, and he instituted a policy that barred writers whose works appeared in *Bulaklak* from being published in *Liwayway*.²⁵ As for *Aliwan*, its closest rival was possibly *Bituin*, which first appeared in May 1946. *Bituin* described itself as ‘aklat ng mga piling nobela’ (book of selected novels) and bore a similar appearance to *Aliwan* in terms of dimension, length, and design. However, while *Bituin* may have been packaged to look like *Aliwan*, it resembled *Liwayway* more as far as content is concerned. Aside from fiction, *Bituin* also featured poems, articles on show business, photographs of film stars, lyrics of songs, jokes and amusing anecdotes. It differed further from *Aliwan* by being published monthly and by selling at one peso (P1.00) per copy. Thus, *Aliwan* managed to maintain its space in the marketplace, for it remained unique as a weekly devoted solely to fiction.

But that position turned out to be a precarious one. By 15 September 1947, the print run of *Aliwan* was at 28,000 copies per issue, indicating a decrease of nearly 2000 units in the circulation figure posted in March of the same year.²⁶ It is likely that the publication experienced a further decline in sales. Certainly, at some point, the situation was serious enough for Palimbagang Tagumpay to implement drastic changes in order to keep its main product competitive in the market. *Aliwan* began diversifying its content by adding sections on famous worldwide sites and structures (‘Kahanga-hanga Sa Daigdig’) and on legends of various cultures (‘Iba’t Ibang Alamat’). Eventually, the publication went through practically a total overhaul. It

²⁵ Reyes, p. 49.

²⁶ ‘Sworn Statement’, *Aliwan* 111, 6 October 1947, p. 126.

was reduced to 84 pages and marked down to thirty centavos (P0.30) per copy beginning with its 123rd issue, which appeared on 29 December 1947. At the same time, the publication was expanded in terms of content variety, and it began assuming a direct timeliness. The 123rd issue, for instance, featured six short stories and a few brief essays, three poems, the section on legends, jokes and quotations, and five pages of comics. It paid special tribute to Rizal, whose death anniversary falls on 30 December, by displaying a portrait of the national hero on the front cover, another on the inside front cover along with a poem about him, and photographs of his personal effects and relics on the third page. The succeeding numbers of *Aliwan* generally conformed to the format set by the 123rd issue while taking on a few innovations along the way, such as the new sections 'Walang Kamatayan' (Immortal) on famous historical figures like Confucius, Napoleon, Cleopatra, among others, and 'Mga Kuwento ng Hukom' (Stories of the Judge) on local legal cases. The publication also continued to take advantage of seasonal events and packaged itself accordingly. Its 22 March 1948 issue (no. 135), for instance, was devoted to Lent and featured articles and stories on Christianity as well as illustrations of Jesus Christ. The issue appeared on the Monday of Holy Week that year. However, it seems that fiction remained the priority of *Aliwan*, at least insofar as its front covers suggest. The typical cover illustration still depicted a key scene from the featured narrative or more precisely, in the changed format, from one of the featured short stories (FIGURE 23). As a whole, though, *Aliwan* appeared less as a special serial of literature than as a generic literary magazine.

Aliwan continued to publish novels but infrequently so and mainly as serials rather than in complete form. The short story had all but replaced full-length fiction in *Aliwan*'s pages. Evidently, novels were harder to come by not only for Palimbagang



FIGURE 23. Front cover of the 143rd issue of *Aliwan*, published on 17 May 1948.

(Image in actual size, with edges cropped for binding; reproduced from the copy of the University of the Philippines Main Library, Filipiniana Section.)

Tagumpay but also for Ramon Roces Publications itself, perhaps more so for the other magazine publishers. Writers, even the hacks among them, could produce only so much for a weekly market that was nearly saturated. It is telling that Ramon Roces Publications launched a novel-writing contest in March 1948. The contest was a means of generating new material and perhaps even discovering new writers. It was a strategy that the company had employed during the pre-war period, initiated in 1925 when the editors of *Liwayway* worried about running out of stories to publish.²⁷ But other than a diminished supply of full-length fiction, *Aliwan* seems to have been faced with the more crucial problem of a dwindling readership. The publishers acted to address the situation by initiating yet another modification to the publication. The 147th issue, published on 14 June 1948, announced that *Aliwan* would be appearing soon in the same size as *Liwayway* (around 28 x 22 cm) but still at the same price of thirty centavos (P0.30). Furthermore, in the same issue, the publishers launched a contest that offered generous prizes. The contest appears to have been a desperate bid to generate sales, for it was designed to lure people not necessarily to read *Aliwan* but rather to buy as many copies as they can. It involved cutting out eleven shapes printed in the publication and forming some artistic figure out of them, say, a person or a house or anything else fancied by the participant (FIGURE 24).²⁸ The figure was then to be pasted on a clean sheet of paper and submitted to the Palimbagang Tagumpay office within the two-week duration of the contest. There was no limit to the number of entries each participant could send. The three best figures chosen among the entries were to be awarded prizes of fifteen pesos (P15) for first place, ten pesos (P10) for second, and five pesos (P5) for third.

²⁷ Reyes, p. 47.

²⁸ 'Patakaran ng Aliwang May Gantimpala Blg. 1', *Aliwan* 147, 14 June 1948, p. 81.

It is not known what came of the contest. It is likely that it did not amount to anything at all and was abandoned altogether. It is also possible that *Aliwan* never appeared in the proposed magazine size. No issues are available beyond the 148th number, which was published in book size on 21 June 1948. Perhaps no issues exist thereafter. This is not to say, however, that *Aliwan* experienced a sudden death. What it did go through was a final transformation or a metamorphosis, as it were. On 8 November 1948, a new Tagalog weekly appeared in the market. It carried typical literary fare (short stories, serialised novels, poems, comic strips), but for the most part, it featured articles on the activities and personalities of the Philippine film industry. The weekly was published by Palimbagang Tagumpay. It was called *Paruparo* (Butterfly) and identified itself in its first issue as 'Ang Dating Aliwan' (The Former *Aliwan*).

It might be said of *Aliwan* that, ultimately, it failed. It could not keep its uniqueness and integrity as a literary periodical; it could not live up to its nationalistic aspirations; it could not maintain the interest and patronage of its audience. Consequently, it sold out: it gave in to commercial pressures and became what was essentially a movie magazine that happened to feature literary pieces, a publication that was no more remarkable than the other cheap weeklies circulating during the post-war period.

Such a conclusion is valid to a certain degree, but it oversimplifies the case of *Aliwan*. Indeed the publication fell short in the end as a literary venture, a nationalistic endeavour, and a commercial product. Nevertheless, as a close examination of the case would reveal, *Aliwan* does stand out as an extraordinary item in the history of literary publishing in the Philippines. It is also an enlightening case. What it stood

for, what it stood up against, and how it stood out at its prime offer an insight into the publishing history of the Tagalog novel.

Of all literary forms and publications in the Philippines, it is perhaps the Tagalog novel that has been exploited most for financial gain by writers and publishers. Commercialism has played an integral role in the history of the Tagalog novel and has contributed both to the advancement and stagnation of the genre in the language. The first novel published in the Philippines, Gabriel Beato Francisco's *Cababalaghan ni P. Bravo* (The Mystery of Fr Bravo), was written in Tagalog and published as a serial in the newspaper *Ang Kapatid ng Bayan* (The Sibling of the Nation) in 1899. Soon after, in the early years of the twentieth century, many other novels appeared in serial form in the Tagalog newspapers of the day and in full-length as books. The writings found an eager and receptive audience. The novel was a new and exciting genre for Filipinos. During the Spanish colonial rule, literature in the vernacular languages had been largely limited to religious writings in traditional verse forms due to the strict censorship enforced by the Church and state. With censorship lifted and foreign novels allowed to be imported into the country by the American administration, Filipino writers enjoyed freedom of expression and discovered new models for their writing. Some poets, journalists, and other writers became novelists almost instantly. The reading public in turn took to fiction just as readily. When weekly magazines in the vernacular languages began appearing in the 1920s and served as the new venue for fiction, the Tagalog novel saw further movement. The weeklies whetted the public's appetite for novels, novellas, and short stories. Like the Tagalog newspapers of earlier years, the magazines achieved brisk sales primarily because they featured fiction. With the rise in the number of weekly magazines came the increase in the demand for fiction from publishers, the growth in the ranks of novelists, and

ultimately the proliferation of Tagalog novels. According to the Surian ng Wikang Pambansa (Institute of National Language), a total of 455 Tagalog novels were published from 1903 to 1938.²⁹

The development of the Tagalog novel during this period was rapid. But it must be said that this was so only as far as the number of titles produced and the reception of the public are concerned. In terms of artistry and imagination, the Tagalog novel made sluggish progress. In the definitive study on the Filipino novel, Resil B. Mojares suggests that the so-called 'Golden Age' of the Tagalog novel (1905-1921) itself was 'perhaps less golden for the artistic and social illuminations it offered than the phenomenal quantity of the novels produced'.³⁰ The early Tagalog novels adopted the narrative structure of Western models but adhered to the conventions of Philippine literary tradition. In general, they employed if not exhausted the elements of romantic love, moral didacticism, sentimentality, and highly stylised language. Some works attempted to break out of the mould of the standard romance novel or the novel of manners by addressing contemporary realities thus taking on a socio-political dimension, but they were merely exceptions to the rule.

Critics point to the emergence of the weekly magazines in the 1920s as the factor that stunted the growth or even contributed to the decline of the Tagalog novel as a literary form. The weekly magazines were business ventures driven by profit. They catered to the interests and demands of the mass market in order to attract wide readerships and to generate high sales. Their editors and publishers naturally were less interested in fostering the Tagalog novel as an artistic creation than as a

²⁹ See 'Talàan ng Mga Nobelang Tagalog', in Iñigo Ed. Regalado, *Ang Pagkaunlad ng Nobelang Tagalog* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1939), pp. 30-46. The bibliography actually lists 469 items, but there are repetitions for some titles.

³⁰ *Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel: A Generic Study of the Novel Until 1940*, 2nd edn (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press), pp. 194-5.

commercial commodity. The works they chose to publish were those that appealed to the masses: moralistic melodramas, or basically stories with stereotypical characters and romantic or sensationalistic plots that offered total entertainment and some moral instruction. Behind such a predilection lie large and complex issues that have existed throughout the history of the Philippine nation—among them, the impoverished state of the majority of the population, the vast gap between social classes not only in economics but also in sensibilities, and the hegemony of the colonial languages (Spanish and English) over the vernacular languages. Suffice it to say here, the taste of the masses was determined in large part by their economic circumstances. With their limited means, which consequently restricted their access to higher education, the masses generally attained a reading literacy that was only at the primary-school or at most secondary-school level.³¹

Writers of Tagalog fiction who sought publication had to cater to the taste of the masses and conform to the standards set by the magazine editors and publishers. The novels they generally produced then were narratives that offered little more than entertainment or, as described commonly by critics, potboilers. According to the early novelist Iñigo Ed. Regalado, many of these writers actually possessed neither reputation nor skill and wrote novels only as a means of making easy money.³² As a source of profit for writers and publishers, the Tagalog novel became limited to the formula prescribed by the weekly magazines. Thus it could hardly progress as a literary form. The quality of the Tagalog novel declined further with the rise of the Philippine film industry beginning in the late 1920s, when directors and producers started turning to the magazines for material for their scripts. Aiming for fat royalties,

³¹ Bienvenido Lumbera, 'Philippine Literature and the Filipino Personality', in *Brown Heritage: Essays on Philippine Cultural Tradition and Literature*, ed. by Antonio G. Manuud (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1967), pp. 1-15 (p. 6).

³² pp. 17-8.

writers churned out novels of high cinematic value but low literary merit.

Furthermore, some writers submitted to the dictates of directors or producers who had purchased the rights to their novels even before the serialisation came to an end.

Since it was common practice for serialised novels to be written as the instalments were published, the writers could and in fact did alter the conflicts, the personalities of heroes or heroines, and even the conclusions of their narratives according to the desires of the filmmakers.³³

As a commercial commodity, the Tagalog novel flourished more as a serial in newspapers or magazines than as a book. This has to do as well with the nature of the audience, with their economic standing in particular. The periodicals were cheaper than books and offered more value for the money of the masses. After being read, the newspapers and magazines could be used for some other purpose, as wrappers for instance, or sold for recycling.

Bearing upon the situation of the Tagalog novel, as well as that of writings in the vernacular languages in general, was a new development in the Philippine literary scene. Filipino writers started producing literature in English. Their novels, short stories, poems, and plays began to be published as books in the early 1920s. Later in that decade, their essays, poems, short stories, and serialised novels began appearing regularly in the newspapers and magazines in English. In the 1930s, Philippine writing in English began to come of age as writers became more prolific and more proficient in the English language. Since its emergence, Philippine literature in English has attracted writers and readers whose literary inclinations tended towards the more serious, more substantial, more crafted—as opposed to the popular or commercial quality that characterised the writings in Tagalog and other vernacular

³³ Reyes, p. 49.

languages. As a result, as far as fiction is concerned, more artistic progress was made in English than in Tagalog despite the fact that there were fewer works produced in English and fewer outlets available to their writers. There was actually a smaller audience for English writing, for while English was the medium of instruction of the public schools established by the Americans throughout country, only a small percentage of the Philippine population attained a genuine command of the language. They were made up of Filipinos who had access to better and higher education, who were generally from the middle and upper classes of society.

A distinction between literature and popular writing arose eventually in the 1930s, where 'literature' was written in English and catered to Filipinos of better education and higher social standing, while 'popular writing' was in the vernacular languages and pandered to the masses. Such a distinction fell in line with the 'colonial mentality', the preference for things Western (American), conditioned in Filipinos by their education and experience under American rule.

The Philippines began preparing for its independence from the United States in 1935. The initiatives taken by the Commonwealth government on the issue of the national language boded well for Tagalog. In 1937, it was proclaimed as the basis of the national language. In 1940, the government authorised the printing of the Tagalog-English dictionary and Tagalog grammar created by the *Surian ng Wikang Pambansa*. Beginning 19 June 1940, Tagalog was taught at the secondary and tertiary levels in all schools throughout the country. Despite these developments, the inferior regard for Tagalog persisted. English continued to be the medium of instruction in schools throughout the country, and it remained to be considered by Filipinos as the language of prestige. During the Japanese Occupation, however, Tagalog was given boost by the Japanese policy that discouraged the use of English.

Tagalog was instituted as an official national language, taught at all levels in schools and designated as the eventual medium of instruction, and promoted as a language of literary expression. It was during this period when serious writing in Tagalog commenced, according to N. V. M. Gonzalez.³⁴ Despite the strict censorship of the government, Tagalog writers found a new freedom since they no longer had to cater exclusively to the taste of the masses and the policies of the magazine editors.³⁵ The periodicals sold in high numbers anyway regardless of what they published. Writers then were able to pay more attention to elements such as style and technique rather than limiting themselves only to content. Agoncillo notes that the literary activity in Tagalog during the Japanese Occupation led to some significant writing, particularly in the short story and essay genres, that bared the potentialities of the language and pointed to 'an auspicious beginning that could become the firm foundation of a future national literature'.³⁶

After World War II, on 4 July 1946, the independence of the Philippines was officially declared. But American influence remained dominant and pervasive in most aspects of Filipino life. English, for instance, was still the official language of the nation and was reinstated as the medium of instruction, while Tagalog became the other official language and continued to be taught as just another subject in schools. In literature, the high regard for writing in English re-surfaced. Apparently, the prejudice against Tagalog was only silenced during the war years, not totally

³⁴ 'The Difficulties With Filipiniana', in *Brown Heritage*, pp. 539-45 (p. 539). Gonzalez, now a National Artist for Literature, was one of the leading writers in English of the pre-war period. He shifted to writing in Tagalog during the Japanese Occupation but returned to using English after the war.

³⁵ Agoncillo, *The Fateful Years*, p. 589.

³⁶ *The Fateful Years*, p. 602.

eradicated. But, as Agoncillo notes, 'the Japanese succeeded in projecting Tagalog to the consciousness of the Filipinos as a language to be desired and developed'.³⁷

The early years of the post-war period were an opportune and urgent time for advocates of Tagalog to build on the legitimacy the language had gained from its designation as the basis of the national language and on the progress it had made as a medium of serious literature. Palimbagang Tagumpay rose to the occasion. It committed itself to the promotion of Tagalog and to the development of literature in the language. Its agent in this mission was *Aliwan*, which served as a venue where the Tagalog novel could make the transition from a form of commercial entertainment into a form of meaningful literature. What allowed *Aliwan* to perform such a function was its duality as a serial publication in book format.

It is this duality that is perhaps most remarkable and fascinating about *Aliwan*. The publication resists categorisation as a magazine or as a book; instead, it strikes a fine balance between both forms. On the one hand, there is no mistaking its nature as a periodical: a staff box and subscription rates were printed in the publication; its text was set in columns; it was published weekly. Yet, on the other, it looked very much like a book. It featured single titles per issue (or set out doing so, at least) and appeared in a size that was typical of books not magazines. Furthermore, it asserted its 'bookness' by not carrying advertisements for other establishments or businesses. Even when it diversified its contents, when it began to decline as a literary publication, it did not sell any of its pages to advertisers.³⁸

The duality of *Aliwan* reflects the attempt of the publishers to unite commerce and art, forces that had been so far incompatible in the history of the Tagalog novel, and

³⁷ *The Fateful Years*, p. 602.

³⁸ Serving perhaps as testimony to *Aliwan*'s nature as a book is the classification determined by the University of the Philippines Main Library, as well as the School of Oriental and African Studies Library in London, where copies of *Aliwan* are held in the book section rather than in the serials area.

to transform the Tagalog novel into a product that had both commercial viability and literary legitimacy. It reveals a publishing strategy that involved a balance itself between guaranteed success and possible failure. When *Aliwan* was launched, there was already an established market for Tagalog novels. It had long been in existence and was displaying no indication of any impending extinction; it was wide, lively, and particularly receptive to weekly publications. The publishers of *Aliwan* used this situation to their advantage. By producing a periodical that offered entertaining fiction written in Tagalog, they met the demands of the Tagalog novel market at one level and gained an immediate foothold in that market. But by publishing *Aliwan* in book form, the publishers took a risk. They pushed the Tagalog novel onto another level and attempted to re-define the inclinations of their market as well as of the Filipino public in general. The publishers promoted *Aliwan* to its readers as 'hiyas ng inyong aklatang pantahanan' (the jewel of your home library). It was a tagline that seems to have served less as a description of the publication than a projection of the publishers' aspirations for the Filipino reader and for the Tagalog novel: that the Filipino reader would develop an interest in literature which was serious enough to lead to the building of personal libraries and that the Tagalog novel would rise to a quality which made it worth keeping as part of a collection rather than serving only as wrappers or scrap paper eventually. By setting such goals, the publishers ultimately challenged realities that not only existed during the early post-war period but that have prevailed throughout the history of publishing in the Philippines. The fact is that Filipinos in general are not keen book readers or buyers. Books in the Philippines are regarded mainly as a material of formal education not so much as a form of entertainment or personal enrichment. Only Filipinos from the higher classes are inclined to read and can afford to buy books, particularly for entertainment, and those

who actually do tend to purchase books in English, more specifically imported titles rather than local ones. Related to this is the fact that Filipinos generally associate libraries, like books, with schools only. Libraries are not common in Filipino homes. Even public libraries are not standard institutions in the towns and cities of the Philippines.

Considering these realities, it might seem that the publishers of *Aliwan* did more than take a risk by packaging their product in book form, that what they did apparently was make a leap of faith. But there was something else about *Aliwan* beyond its nature as a serial publication that kept it grounded in the Tagalog novel market: its literary standards were traditional. That is to say, they conformed to quality of fiction produced during the pre-war period. The criteria held by the *Aliwan* editors may even be described as dubious given the publication's high aims for the nation and the national language. An incident that occurred before the war sheds light on *Aliwan*'s concept of quality literary writing. On 2 March 1940, a small group of writers gathered for a bonfire at Plaza Moriones, a public square in Tondo, Manila. It was not a social event but rather a demonstration against the masters of Tagalog literature at the time. The writers were members of the organisation Panitikan (Literature), which represented the younger generation of Tagalog authors. They decried the stagnant state of Philippine literature and blamed commercialism as the impediment to progress. They cast into the fire printed novels, short stories, poems, and other writings that they considered a disgrace to Philippine literature and unworthy of being passed on to future generations.³⁹ Most of works they burned were by the older generation of writers, mostly members of the literary group Ilaw at

³⁹ Virgilio S. Almario, 'Book-Burning at Plaza Moriones', in *Kasaysayan: The Story of the Filipino People*, 10 vols (New York: Asia Publishing Company, 1998), X, 218-9 (p. 218).

Panitik.⁴⁰ *Aliwan*'s original crop of twenty writers was from this older generation.

Susana de Guzman, for example, the first writer featured by the periodical, had all her titles thrown in the bonfire of 1940.⁴¹ Many of the authors published by *Aliwan*, like de Guzman, were members of Ilaw at Panitik. Pedrito Reyes himself and his assistant editor Gervasio B. Santiago were part of the literary group. In a sense then *Aliwan* restored 'valuable writings' of the Philippines that were destroyed not only in the burning of the National Library during World War II but also in the bonfire at Plaza Moriones. For instance, among the works burned in 1940 were the Lola Basiang stories of Severino Reyes, which *Aliwan* not only reprinted but also packaged in three special edition books. The first and third of these volumes were published before Christmas (1946 and 1948, respectively) and promoted as gift books; the second volume (1947) was the 100th issue of *Aliwan*.

While *Aliwan* set out to reprint the 'classics' of Tagalog literature, or what the editors deemed as such, the periodical actually ended up publishing more new material rather than old favourites. For example, of the twenty-two issues published during *Aliwan*'s initial phase, when it appeared in chapbook form, only one issue (no. 11) featured a reprinted title: 'Hindi Bulag ang Pag-Ibig' (Love Is Not Blind) by Jesus S. Esguerra, which was first published in 1926. It is not unlikely that the outburst of literary activity after the war led the publishers of *Aliwan* to stray from their original plan. Early on, the publication might have found a ready supply of new material since writers were no longer uninspired or terrified to produce fiction, particularly in longer form, as they were during the Japanese Occupation. Perhaps, later, *Aliwan* continued to publish more new fiction as a concession to the demands of the market. Some of

⁴⁰ A. G. Abadilla, F. B. Sebastian, and A. D. G. Mariano, *Ang Maikling Kathang Tagalog* (Manila: Silangan Publishing House, 1954), pp.16-7.

⁴¹ Abadilla, et al., p. 17.

the new titles published by *Aliwan* were especially timely, such as 'Dalawang Bandila' (Two Flags) by Alfonso Sujeco (11 March 1946, no. 29), which touched on Philippine-American relations; 'Sariling Pagtatapat ni Heneral Wainwright' (Confessions of General Wainwright; 17 July 1946, no. 43), a translation of the memoirs of Jonathan Wainwright, who assumed command of the United States Armed Forces in the Far East in 1942; and 'Mises G. I.' (Mrs G. I.) by Carlos Padilla (22 April 1946, no. 35) and 'Hanggang Pier' (Up To the Pier) by Mateo Cruz Cornelio (15 July 1946, no. 47), which dealt with relationships of young Filipino women and American soldiers.⁴² Most of the new titles were love stories with moral lessons and fairy-tale endings. All of the titles published by *Aliwan*, both old and new, bore the stamp of popular appeal. They essentially catered to the taste of the masses, which had not changed much since the publication of the first Tagalog novel. Perhaps it cannot be doubted that the publishers of *Aliwan* were earnest in their intention of contributing to the development of Tagalog literature and the promotion of the language. It was the implementation of their objective, however, that seems suspect. Evidently, they could see beyond the form of publication that Tagalog fiction had been largely limited to but not beyond the quality of content that had defined it.

As a serial publication, *Aliwan* was a fairly competitive product in the Tagalog novel market of the early post-war period, particularly from July 1945 when it first appeared to September 1947 before it began diversifying its content. As a book, *Aliwan* was the leading literary publication of the time. From 1945 to 1947, only sixteen books of Tagalog fiction were published; all were novels. Of this total, four

⁴² Shortly after the liberation of Manila in 1945, Agoncillo observes, 'Almost everywhere one could see Filipino girls, now emancipated, in the company of American GI's. The young Filipino men began to ridicule the girls who went unchaperoned with the GI's and shouted at them: "*Hanggang piyer lang kayó!* The pier is your only destination!" Meaning that the young women who had been "going steady" with the GI's would be left behind when the time for the latter's departure for the United States came'. *The Fateful Years*, p. 843.

titles bore the imprint of Juliana Martinez, two of Associated Enterprises, two of Ilagan at Sanga, two of Palimbagang Tagumpay, one of Encal Press, one of United Printers' Cooperative Association, and one of Tableria San Vicente.⁴³ Three titles bore no imprint at all. Aside from Juliana Martinez, Ilagan at Sanga, and Palimbagang Tagumpay, which were undoubtedly publishing houses, the rest of the establishments appear to have been printing presses. It is likely that the novels bearing their imprints and the novels with no imprints were published by the authors themselves. This is in light of the fact that the self-publication of literary works and the identification of the printer rather than the publisher in title pages had been common practices in the Philippines before the war and would continue to be more or less so throughout the rest of the twentieth century. Like typical self-published efforts, most of these novels were probably small-scale productions. Palimbagang Tagumpay's *Fort Santiago* provides the only available data on print-run sizes of literary books during the period. Its first edition (1945) was issued in 10,000 copies. The figure hardly appears to have been the standard, considering the special circumstances of the publishing house and the high cost of paper during the time. Even the firm of Juliana Martinez, which was among the more established of the day, seems unlikely to have published novels in such large print runs. Martinez had no giant magazine enterprise to support the financing, production, and distribution of her publications. While no speculations can be made on the print-run sizes of the novels published during the 1945-1947 period, other than the two Palimbagang Tagumpay titles, it can be assumed with some certainty that the novels appeared in editions made up of less than 10,000 copies. Whatever the actual figures are, they pale in comparison to *Aliwan*'s numbers. At its peak, in March 1947, *Aliwan* was being published at 29,935

⁴³ See *Nobelista 75: Panimulang Talaan ng mga Nobelang Tagalog 1900-1974* (Quezon City: Ang Aklatan, Unibersidad ng Pilipinas, 1974).

copies per issue, per week. If *Aliwan* is to be considered as a book, then its status as the literary bestseller of its time cannot but be acknowledged. It is an arbitrary distinction at best. Nonetheless, all the available evidence suggests that the most popular literary publication in the Philippines during the period 1945-1947 was the *Aliwan* book series.

Aliwan followed the usual course taken by bestsellers: it experienced a rapid decline in popularity and slipped into oblivion eventually. *Aliwan*, and the Tagalog novel for that matter, had had its moment in the spotlight. New forms of entertainment were claiming the attention of the Filipino masses. Cinema, for one, was quickly rising in popularity and would reach its peak in the 1950s, the Philippine film industry's own so-called Golden Age. Palimbagang Tagumpay was evidently aware of this development and acted accordingly, making no more declarations of serving the interests of nationalism. *Paruparo*, which *Aliwan* had transformed into, was unabashedly commercial. It capitalised on the taste of the masses and devoted itself to cinema. Its first issue, for example, featured on its cover a photographic still from *Bulaklak at Paruparo* (Flower and Butterfly), a film which was then forthcoming and which starred the matinee idols of the day Rosa del Rosario and Rogelio de la Rosa. The other rising form of popular entertainment was the comic book (*komiks*), which began to loosen the grip of 'traditional' fiction on the consciousness of the nation. Filipino comic books started appearing regularly in the market in 1947, initially as fortnightly and then as weekly publications. They featured illustrated novels in serials, illustrated short stories, and comic strips; they were sold at prices less than that of magazines, typically at twenty-five centavos (P0.25) per copy. In the succeeding decades, comic books would achieve a phenomenal popularity, and their publishing would become an industry in itself. It hardly comes as a surprise then that the

mention of 'Aliwan' today brings to mind the *Aliwan Komiks* series, launched in 1962, and not the peculiar little post-war serial publication in book form that boldly devoted itself to Tagalog fiction.

CHAPTER FIVE

A SERIOUS BUSINESS

Philippine comic book publishing from the late 1940s to the mid-1980s

The devil, according to Henry Sendaydiego of the University of Santo Tomas Faculty of Philosophy, was threatening the future of the Philippine nation. Writing in the university newspaper *Varsitarian* in 1951, Sendaydiego declared that ‘mortal incisions’ were being inflicted on the minds of the Filipino youth without their knowing it. The devil was lurking in disguise amongst their textbooks, under their pillows, in their bookcases, in their pockets. ‘Beware of the devil in that new attire of his’, Sendaydiego appealed to the youth: their education, health, morality, sense of reality, and sense of safety were all in danger.¹ It was a zealous warning but one that would prove to be futile. The charms of the devil were much too powerful to resist. The youth, as well as many Filipinos of all ages, let themselves be captivated.

The devil in new attire that Sendaydiego was referring to was the comic book (*komiks*), a form that began to be published in the Philippines in the late 1940s and was attracting an increasing following in the early 1950s. The comic book would achieve production, circulation, and readership figures unparalleled by any other entertaining reading material in the history of Philippine publishing. Its popularity would be phenomenal. While Church leaders, government officials, and other guardians of public morality, including those self-appointed like Sendaydiego, would express alarm

¹ ‘The Devil in a New Look’, *Varsitarian*, 20 December 1951, p. 24, repr. in *Philippine Comic Magazine: Kalabog, Kenkoy, Phantomanok, Etc.*, comp. by M. Georgette C. Solina (Quezon City: Institute of Mass Communication, University of the Philippines, 1980), pp. 54-8 (p. 54).

over such a development and would attempt to dissuade the public from patronising the form, their admonishments were largely ignored. The comic book would become an essential part of life and culture throughout practically the entire Philippine archipelago for most of the second half of the twentieth century. As literary publications, *komiks* would emerge as great bestsellers of the nation.

Philippine scholarship generally regarded the rise of the Filipino comic book with either indifference or hostility. Literary criticism, in particular, was disparaging if not dismissive of the form. For instance, in a survey of literary works published in the Philippines during 1954 that appeared in the academic journal *Philippine Studies*, Leo A. Cullum cited comic books as an 'important culprit' behind the lack of a reading public in the Philippines. He counted comics along with radio, movies, and television as the 'four obstacles to the growth of a reading habit and therefore ultimately to the production of books'.² This was an assessment made apparently without irony whatsoever at a time when there were already six comic book titles circulating throughout the nation, each published every other week with print runs of at least 10,000 copies per issue, and when there was a progressively growing public that was not only reading the publications but also developing a voracious habit out of such an activity. Other critics have rightfully acknowledged comic books as reading matter but have looked upon them as low class ('bakya'), rubbish ('basura'), or a handful of ludicrousness and nonsense ('isang dakot na kabalbalan at kabalastugan').³ However, the rapid and massive growth of comic book publishing in the Philippines beginning in the 1960s placed the form in a position that critics could no longer ignore so easily nor condemn so readily. In the 1970s, as nationalist and socialist sentiments were

² 'Literary Survey - 1954', *Philippine Studies* 3.1 (March 1955), 90-6 (p. 96).

³ Soledad S. Reyes, 'Ilehitimong Panitikan: Ang Komiks Bilang Salamin ng Buhay', *Sagisag*, 11-12 (1976), 13-9, repr. in *Philippine Comic Magazine*, pp. 6-24 (p. 6).

stirred during Martial Law under President Ferdinand E. Marcos, academics began to look more kindly upon the comic book, which had already become the favourite reading material of the Filipino masses. Soledad S. Reyes, one of the most ardent defenders of the *komiks* in Philippine academe, challenged the classification of the form as illegitimate literature ('ilehitimong panitikan'), a perception that prevailed among the intellectual and social elite of the day. She described the comic book as the only form of literature that is full of promise and possibility for heightening the awareness of the majority of Filipinos about their experiences in life.⁴ The comic book is a mirror of life ('salaming ng buhay'), Reyes declared, one that clearly reflected the conditions, circumstances, and sensibilities of common Filipinos. (To view the comic book with contempt then, in effect, would be to denigrate the lives of the Filipino masses.) Sociologists, psychologists, and other cultural critics also found the comic book worthy of scholarly enquiry and began examining its role in Philippine life and culture.⁵

It is as an art form that the comic book came to be truly appreciated and even celebrated by the intellectual and social establishment. No less than the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), the imposing national institution of arts and culture, has staged exhibitions commemorating the works of comic book artists. Perhaps the acknowledgement of the form's artistic value had to do with the fact that some of the most important contemporary artists of the Philippines started out as comic book illustrators or had ventured into the form early in their careers (among them, the late National Artist Vicente Manansala, the painter Mauro 'Malang' Santos, and the

⁴ '[Ang komiks] lamang ang uri ng panitikan na puno ng pangako at posibilidad tungo sa pagpapatindi ng kamalayan ng nakararaming Pilipino tungkol sa karanasan sa buhay'. 'Ilehitimong Panitikan', p. 7.

⁵ See, for instance, Karina Constantino-David, 'The Changing Images of Heroes in Local Comic Books', *Philippine Journal of Communication Studies* (September 1974), 1-22; and Federico Licsi Espino Jr, 'The Philosophy of Escapism', *The Review* 2.2 (July-August 1979), 13-5, repr. in *Philippine Comic Magazine*, pp. 116-22.

multi-media artist Ben Cabrera). Perhaps this was also due to the recognition gained by local artists from the American comic book industry. Many Filipino illustrators were hired by prominent companies in the United States such as DC Comics and Marvel Comics, and this was regarded proudly as a validation of Filipino artistry and talent. What seems certain is that the illustrations in the comic books of the Philippines, especially publications of the 1950s, displayed remarkable imagination and skill that made art critics and other artists themselves take notice (FIGURE 25). The outstanding quality of the drawings offered a broad appeal, one that could and did cross social boundaries in the Philippines. It is mainly for the artwork that the early Filipino comic books became the collectable items they are now. The early comic book artists, too, attracted new attention from art enthusiasts of today who have set up websites, formed groups, and launched various projects in honour of the artists.⁶

As for the writing in the comic books, the quality was inarguably popular, commercial, or lowbrow if not low class. Unsurprisingly, comic book writers were less interested in producing literary masterpieces than in satisfying the interests and desires of their mass audience. By the late 1970s, this audience swelled to a number in the millions. Serious literary works had no place in the typical Filipino home, whereas the comic book became a fairly standard fixture. It served as literature for a significant part of the Philippine population. Therefore, in spite of the characters that were stereotypical on the one hand and out of this world (often literally) on the other, the incredible or sometimes absolutely absurd plots, the blatant sentimentality, and the formulaic quality that defined comic book writing, its legitimacy as a literary form could no longer be denied.

⁶ Notable among these endeavours is The Philippine Comics Art Museum on the Internet <<http://www.komikero.com/museum/index.html>>, established on 26 June 2004 by Gerry Alanguilan, a comic book collector and member of the Komikero Arts Group.



FIGURE 25. A sampling of *komiks* pages from the 1950s displaying masterful artwork: (a) 'Medalyang Pilak' (Silver Medallion) written by Pablo S. Gomez and illustrated by Tony Zuñiga, from *Tagalog Klasiks* 64, 15 December 1951; (b) 'El Indio' (The Native) written and illustrated by Francisco V. Coching, from *Pilipino Komiks* 147, 1953; (c) 'Sa Ngalan ng Pag-Ibig' (In the Name of Love) written by Leo F. Meneses and illustrated by Fred F. Alcantara, from *Tagalog Klasiks* 94, 7 February 1953; and (d) 'Bim, Bam, Bum' written by Gomez and illustrated by Alfredo P. Alcala, from *Tagalog Klasiks* 146, 5 February 1955.

(Images reduced and rendered in black and white; reproduced from The Philippine Comics Art Museum <<http://www.komikero.com/museum/index.html>>.)

In a textbook on Philippine mass media published in 1986, Clodualdo del Mundo Jr described the *komiks* not only as an industry and a potent medium but also as 'our national "book"'.⁷ Del Mundo's cautious reference to the publication as a book points to the issue of its classification, one that is more nebulous than it seems in the Philippine setting. The comic book, in general, is technically a serial publication; it is a magazine that happens to be made up of comic strips (as defined by *The Oxford American Dictionary of Current English*). Filipino comic books are indeed periodicals: They appeared biweekly, weekly, or fortnightly. They were of a standard size of 24 x 17 cm, with the number of pages ranging from 32 to 60 (inclusive of front and back covers); their covers and pages were in newsprint and bound by staples in single gatherings. Their covers were printed in full colour, the inside texts in black-and-white mainly with a few pages in two to four colours. The comic books featured an assortment of reading content in each issue: illustrated serial novels and short stories, funny comic strips, some articles in full text on various subjects (from politics to show business). The publications, too, carried advertisements for different commercial products and establishments. Philippine comic book publishers themselves considered their products as magazines beginning in the mid-1960s, when the Bureau of Internal Revenue tried to impose a 3 per cent sales tax on *komiks* as 'books'.⁸ Some publishers added 'magasin' (magazine) to their comic book titles in order to avoid paying the tax. But, in certain aspects, the comic book is not quite like any periodical in the Philippines. For one, the publications rivalled the major newspapers more than they did other magazines in terms of distribution (nationwide) and circulation (over

⁷ 'Komiks: An Industry, A Potent Medium, Our National "Book", and Pabulum of Art Appreciation', in *Philippine Mass Media: A Book of Readings*, ed. by Clodualdo del Mundo and Jose Mari Magpayo (Metro Manila: Communication Foundation for Asia, 1986), pp. 170- 85 (p. 179).

⁸ Sylvia L. Mayuga, 'From Kenkoy to Tisoy: Komiks and the Filipino Consciousness', *Sunburst*, April 1976, pp. 14-21, repr. in *Philippine Comic Magazine*, pp. 25-41 (p. 35).

100,000 per issue for some titles by the mid-1970s). Unlike the other periodicals, too, Filipino comic books survived and prospered on circulation alone rather than on advertising.⁹ Then, the comic books have had a lasting impact on Philippine culture: certain *komiks* heroes and heroines as well as villains have become part of the Filipino psyche; some expressions and terms that originated in the *komiks* have found their way into the Filipino vocabulary; the leading *komiks* artists and writers have emerged as household names and icons of popular culture. Ultimately, the comic book served as a vehicle of literature and performed a function more similar to that of books of fiction rather than that of magazines. It was for the featured novels and short stories that the comic books were read eagerly and regularly by an astonishing number of Filipinos. The comic books functioned primarily to satisfy the public demand for fiction. During the decades of the 1960s, when comic book publishing in the Philippines developed into a formidable industry, until the 1980s, when other forms of entertainment began to challenge the dominance held by the publication on the attention of Filipinos, *komiks* were the literary bestsellers of the nation. Del Mundo's description of the publication as the Philippine national book, self-conscious as it is, stands as fairly appropriate.

The phenomenal popularity of *komiks*, a subject addressed by many studies and commentaries, has been commonly attributed to the cheap and easy escape it provided readers from the harsh realities of their daily lives. Reyes has noted further that the comic books appealed to the Filipino masses because they reflected the people's collective consciousness: the illustrated novels and short stories drew their characters, plots, and themes from native folklore, metrical romances (*awit* and *corrido*) of the Spanish colonial period, American popular culture, and realities of modern-day

⁹ *Book of the Philippines 1976* (Manila: The Research and Analysis Center for Communications and Aardvark Associates, 1976), p. 286.

existence in the local town and city.¹⁰ The stories in the *komiks*, as the Tagalog novelist Efren Abueg put it, made manifest the feelings, thoughts, and attitudes of the Filipino.¹¹ However, there is one crucial factor behind the popularity of the comic book in the Philippines that most studies and commentaries have paid little attention to if not overlooked: the *komiks* was the product of a vast and complex commercial enterprise, an industry that had the capacity to produce the publications regularly in massive numbers, to distribute them efficiently throughout the nation, and to maintain their profitability in the mass market. Furthermore, the Philippine comic book industry was dominated by a select group of writers, artists, and publishers. A virtual monopoly, in fact, ran it. In large part, it was controlled by a chain of companies owned by the leading magazine publisher in the country, Ramon Roces. Del Mundo cites this fact but explores it neither at length nor in depth. Cynthia Roxas and Joaquin Arevalo Jr's *A History of Komiks of the Philippines and Other Countries* (1984), perhaps the most definitive account on the genre, makes no mention of the monopoly issue. This is not surprising, however, for the book was produced under the imprint of Islas Filipinas Publishing, a Roces-owned company. Among the studies on the Filipino comic book, it is only Corazon D. Villareal's 'Ang Industriya ng Komiks: Noon at Ngayon' (The Komiks Industry: Then and Now), published in the CCP journal *Kultura* (1990), that pays some attention to the monopoly in the *komiks* industry and raises it as an important issue. It is indeed a matter worth examining further, for the popularity of the comic book—or more specifically its status as the literary bestseller in the Philippines from the 1960s to the 1980s—has just as much to do with

¹⁰ Soledad S. Reyes, 'The Philippine Komiks', in *Philippine Mass Media*, pp. 169-78.

¹¹ 'The Komiks and the Filipino', in Cynthia Roxas and Joaquin Arevalo Jr, *A History of Komiks of the Philippines and Other Countries*, ed. by Ramon R. Marcelino (Quezon City: Islas Filipinas Publishing, 1984), pp. 2-3 (p. 3).

how the publications were produced, distributed, and promoted as with what they offered for their readers' entertainment, pleasure, and awareness.

The Filipino comic book traces its origins to the comic strips published in the vernacular magazines beginning in the late 1920s. At this initial stage in the history of the *komiks*, Ramon Roces was already involved in producing the material and was actually at its forefront. It was in the pages of the leading weekly *Liwayway* (Dawn), published in Tagalog by Ramon Roces Publications, where the first comic strip series of the Philippines appeared. In its 11 January 1929 issue, *Liwayway* debuted a four-panel, black-and-white strip entitled 'Mga Kabalbalan ni Kenkoy' (The Antics of Kenkoy), written by Romualdo Ramos and illustrated by Antonio (Tony) S. Velasquez. The comic strip told of the misadventures of Kenkoy, a regular guy who dreamed big and fashioned himself as a dandy. Kenkoy (a play on 'Kiko' or 'Kikoy', typical nicknames for Francisco) was 'a caricature of Jazz Age Philippines', with his baggy pants, his hair slicked and parted à la Rudolph Valentino, and his Tagalog speech peppered with English expressions (spelled as they were pronounced by Filipinos: for instance, 'wasamara' for 'what's the matter' or 'nating duwing' for 'nothing doing').¹² 'Kenkoy' was an immediate hit with *Liwayway* readers. After three weeks, the strip was expanded to six panels, filling up half a page; within a year, it was a full-page feature printed in four colours.¹³ Encouraged by the success of 'Kenkoy', the Ramos-Velasquez team produced another comic series for *Liwayway* entitled 'Ponyang Halobaybay', named after the pretty and stylish heroine. The series was also well-received, and Ponyang even became a fashion plate of the day.¹⁴ After

¹² Mayuga, p. 27.

¹³ Mayuga, p. 27.

Ramos's death in 1932, Velasquez continued to produce the 'Kenkoy' and 'Ponyang' strips on his own. 'Kenkoy' eventually appeared also in the other vernacular magazines published by Roces; the strip was translated into Cebuano (for *Bisaya*), in Hiligaynon (*Hiligaynon*), in Ilokano (*Bannawag*), and in Bikol (*Bicolnon*). The fame of Kenkoy spread throughout the country, and he soon became a Filipino icon.¹⁵ Velasquez went on to create other comic strip series for the Roces publications and to play an integral role in the development of the Filipino comic book industry.

It was also *Liwayway* that initiated the publishing of fiction in comic strip form. In 1933, the illustrated adventure series 'Kulafu' appeared in the magazine. Written by Pedrito Reyes and illustrated by Francisco Reyes, the series told of the exploits of Kulafu, lord of a Philippine jungle during the pre-Spanish colonial period; it was a Filipino version of Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes*.¹⁶ Following the lead of the Roces weeklies, other vernacular magazines also began including humorous comic strips and illustrated serial fiction as regular features in their pages. But it would not be until after World War II when periodicals made up entirely of comic strips came to be published in the Philippines.

The first Filipino comic book appeared late in 1946. It was named *Halakhak Komiks* and published in Manila by Jaime Lucas, a lawyer and bookshop owner. *Halakhak* (onomatopoeic for boisterous laughter) bore the tag line 'Kasaysayan Hiwaga

¹⁴ Cynthia Roxas and Joaquin Arevalo Jr, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', in *A History of Komiks*, pp. 4-46 (p. 11).

¹⁵ Such was the popularity of Kenkoy that he became the subject of a poem in the late 1930s by the prominent Tagalog poet Jose Corazon de Jesus (Huseng Batute) and of the musical composition 'Kenkoy Blues' (1939) by Nicanor Abelardo, who would become a National Artist for Music (Mayuga, p. 28). During World War II, Kenkoy was the only cartoon character allowed to see print by the Japanese administration; moreover, he was used by the Japanese Information Bureau to promote their health campaign throughout the country (Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', p. 11). Two live feature films based on the 'Kenkoy' series have been produced, with popular comedians in the lead role: one in 1950, with Lopito as Kenkoy, the other in 1972 with Chiquito. Kenkoy has also become part of the Filipino vocabulary, as an adjective used colloquially to denote 'silly' or 'foolish'.

¹⁶ Cynthia Roxas and Joaquin Arevalo Jr, 'Filipino Scriptwriters and Artists', in *A History of Komiks*, pp. 62- 139 (p. 67). The 'Kulafu' series ran until 1941.

Katatawanan' (Stories Mystery Comedy). It featured funny comic strips, illustrated serial novels and short stories, illustrated series on Filipino history and folklore (such as a biography of Jose Rizal and a retelling of the Bernardo Carpio legend), crossword puzzles, song lyrics with illustrations, Filipino riddles and proverbs. The publication also carried 'editorials and editorial cartoons that commented on the issues of the day such as agrarian reform and the presence of American military forces in the country'.¹⁷ Measuring 25 x 17 cm, the publication contained 42 pages (inclusive of covers) in newsprint; its covers were printed in three colours while the inside text was in black-and-white. *Halkahak* was printed by Carmelo & Bauermann, one of the most prestigious presses of the time, with a print run of 10,000 copies per issue.¹⁸ It offered its readers six-month and annual subscriptions, but it would run for only ten issues. This brief existence probably had to do with the cost of the publication. At forty centavos (P0.40) a copy, *Halakhak* was more expensive than the weekly magazines, which were selling typically at thirty centavos (P0.30) each. While short-lived, *Halakhak* left an impression on Philippine publishing: it set the pattern in terms of appearance and content that many publications would follow.

Halakhak, and the Filipino comic book in general, took its format from the comic books brought into the Philippines by the American soldiers who came to reclaim the country from the Japanese forces during World War II. The American comic books introduced Filipinos to a new kind of publication and revealed to them the full potential of comic strips. Local writers, artists, and publishers 'were fascinated by the creative combination of novel, painting, and movie in one reading matter', and they

¹⁷ Danny Mariano, 'In the Name of the Masses', *TV Times*, 10-16 September 1978, pp. 6-8, repr. in *Philippine Comic Magazine*, pp. 42-51 (pp. 43-4).

¹⁸ Mariano, p. 43.

set out to produce their own versions.¹⁹ The *komiks* would also look to American models for characters, plots, and themes as well as for styles in illustration. Indeed the American comic books would bear a heavy and lasting influence on the local publications. In this respect, the 'DI-13' series written by Damian (Damy) S. Velasquez (younger brother of Tony) and illustrated by Jesse F. Santos serves as a salient example. The series, which ran from 1947 to 1962 in *Pilipino Komiks*, recounts the adventures of the intrepid crime-fighting police detective called 'Trese', after his badge number DI-13. (Spanish words were still commonly used then for numbers, but their spellings were Filipinized.) 'DI-13' was inspired evidently by Dick Tracy. The name 'Trese' itself was a pun on 'Tracy': the names sound quite alike when pronounced in the Filipino accent. While Trese was not made to resemble Dick Tracy in physical appearance, neither was he drawn to look distinctly Filipino (FIGURE 26). Like most characters in Filipino comic books, Trese's features were more Western than native. Many other *komiks* characters were local adaptations or variations of American heroes, among them Captain Barbell (Captain Marvel), Lastikman (Mr Fantastic of The Fantastic Four), and Darna (Wonder Woman). It is important to note, however, that the *komiks* writers and artists did more than merely reproduce and translate the American models, that they actually displayed a creativity and imagination all their own. The eponymous character Lagim (Terror), of the action-adventure series by Caguintuan which first appeared in *Pilipino Komiks* in 1947, is particularly revealing of this. Lagim is a masked and caped crusader who fights the Japanese invaders in the Philippines during Word War II (FIGURE 27).²⁰ To a certain degree, the character is a crossbreed of Batman and The Phantom, but Lagim is quite original as a Filipino super-guerrilla. He was of special relevance to readers as well,

¹⁹ Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', p. 11.

²⁰ Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', p. 13.



FIGURE 26. Page from the 'DI-13' series, written by Damy Velasquez and illustrated by Jesse F. Santos, in *Pilipino Komiks* 352, 26 November 1960.

(Image reduced and rendered in black-and-white; reproduced from The Philippine Comics Art Museum <<http://www.komikero.com/museum/jesse1.html>>.)

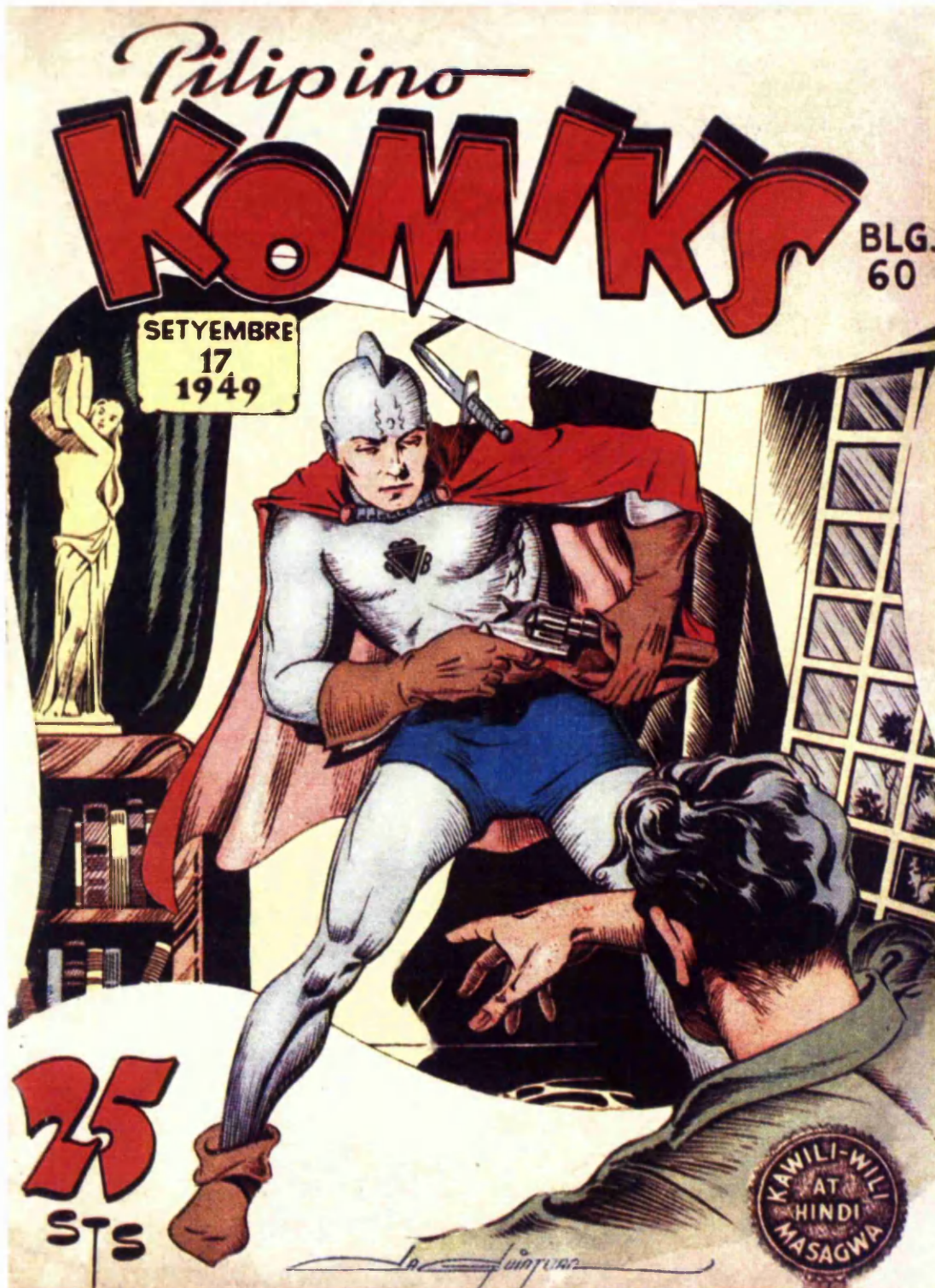


FIGURE 27. Front cover of *Pilipino Komiks* 60, 17 September 1949, featuring the Filipino super-guerrilla Lagim, created by the writer-illustrator who went by the pseudonym Caguintuan.

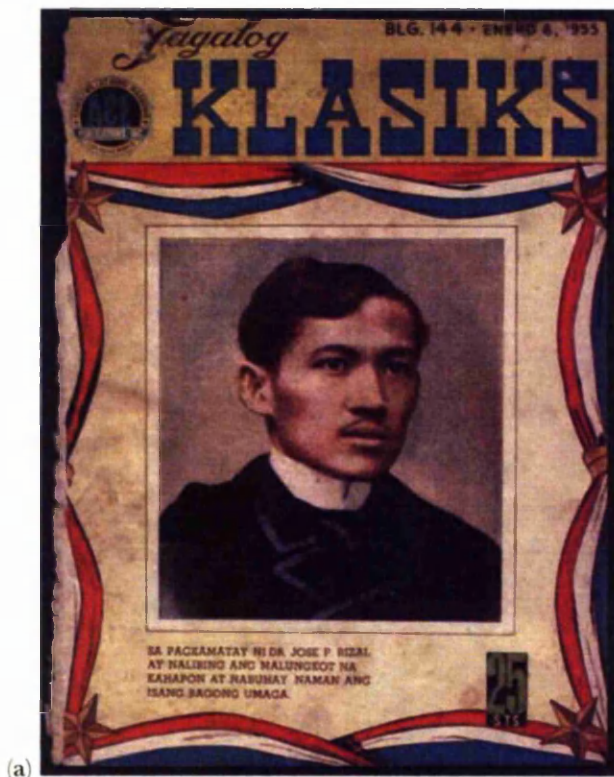
(Image reduced; reproduced from The Philippine Comics Art Museum <<http://www.komikero.com/museum/caguintuan02.html>>.)

for his series was published at a time when the Philippines was in the process of recovering from the harrowing experience of the Japanese Occupation (1942-1945). In the 1970s, American television and cinema would serve as sources of new material for *komiks* writers and artists, inspiring Filipino versions of *Charlie's Angels* and *The Six Million Dollar Man* or *Jaws* and *Rocky*, for instance. But other Western influences—fairy tales, ancient mythology, medieval romances—would also be absorbed by the Filipino comic book. For example, the Ugly Duckling and Cinderella motifs were favourites of the writers of love story *komiks*; centaurs, gorgons, mermaids, and other such creatures were standard characters for the writers of fantasy; and a host of princes and princesses were created or re-created by writers of all kinds of comic book genres. Despite the significance of foreign influences, however, the *komiks* would display a sensibility that was distinctly Filipino, with a sense of humour that was inclined towards slapstick and had a penchant for puns; a strong belief in supernatural forces, both good and evil; an unabashed sentimentality; and an unwavering optimism (thus the requisite happy endings of the stories). The comic books would draw heavily too on local culture; retellings of Philippine legends, folktales, and history would exist alongside the imported elements and materials in the *komiks* (FIGURE 28).²¹

On 27 May 1947, Ramon Roces established Ace Publications, a firm dedicated to comic book publishing, with Tony Velasquez as one of the stockholders.²² In less than a month, the company produced its first title: the maiden issue of *Pilipino Komiks* appeared in the market on 14 June 1947. Velasquez served as editor of the publication and also as a contributor. Other titles from the company soon followed—*Tagalog Klasiks* in July 1949, *Huwaga Komiks* in October 1950, and *Espesyal Komiks* in October 1952. Each title had its own distinction: *Pilipino Komiks* carried material of

²¹ Reyes, 'The Philippine Komiks', p. 171.

²² Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', p. 11.



(a)



(b)



FIGURE 28. The life and works of the Philippine national hero Jose Rizal were favourite materials of *komiks* writers and artists. The 8 January 1955 issue of *Tagalog Klasiks*, for example, displayed a portrait of Rizal on its front cover (a) and featured the story of his execution on 31 December 1896 (sample pages, b). Entitled 'Mi Ultimo Adios' (My Final Farewell), after Rizal's poem written on the eve of his execution, the story was 'researched' by Ramon R. Marcelino and illustrated by Nestor Redondo.

(Images reduced, sample pages (b) rendered in black and white; reproduced from The Philippine Comics Art Museum <<http://www.komikero.com/museum/miultimoadios.html>>.)

general interest; *Tagalog Klasiks* featured ‘classics’ of Philippine folklore as well as foreign myths and tales (FIGURE 29); *Hiwaga Komiks* specialised in mystery (‘hiwaga’), horror, and fantasy stories; and *Espesyal Komiks* offered narratives of love, action-adventure, and fantasy (FIGURE 30). But these distinctions would become blurred eventually, with the comic books each offering a mixed bag of contents to appeal to all kinds of readers—stories of romantic love, drama, comedy, action and adventure, mystery and horror. The Ace Publications titles also published highlights of news reports, typically in one-page columns and in full text, and editorials on current issues and events. Occasionally, instructional articles were carried too. The 30 December 1961 issue of *Tagalog Klasiks*, for example, carried the piece entitled ‘Tayo’y Magtanim’ (Let Us Plant) in comic strip format, which discussed the proper planting of pineapples. *Pilipino Komiks*, *Tagalog Klasiks*, *Hiwaga Komiks*, and *Espesyal Komiks* were all published in Tagalog, issued fortnightly, and priced at twenty-five centavos (P0.25) per copy. The publications were cheap and accessible, considering that the daily minimum wage in 1951 was at four pesos (P4.00) for non-agricultural workers and two pesos and fifty centavos (P2.50) for agricultural workers.²³ Furthermore, the comic books offered wholesome entertainment for readers of all ages—or so the publisher claimed. The titles all bore on their covers the Ace Publications seal, which declared ‘Kawili-wili at Hindi Masagwa’ (Entertaining and Not Vulgar). *Pilipino Komiks* would be the most popular among the titles and the most successful Filipino comic book ever; its initial print run of 10,000 copies per issue in 1947 would rise to 120,000 by 1961 (FIGURE 31).²⁴ Ace Publications also produced the ‘pocket size’

²³ Minimum Wage Law (Republic Act 602), 4 August 1951, in ‘Summary of Wage Legislations Granting Increases in the Basic Minimum Wage (1951-1989)’, *National Wages and Productivity Commission, Department of Labor and Employment Official Website*, <http://www.nwpc.dole.gov.ph/pages/statistics/stat_wage%20rates1951-89.html> [accessed 6 April 2005].

²⁴ Roxas and Arevalo, ‘The Birth of the Philippine Komiks’, p. 11.



FIGURE 29. Front cover of *Tagalog Klasiks* 30, 26 August 1950, depicting a scene from the featured serial novel 'Hara-siri' written by Gregorio C. Coching and illustrated by Francisco V. Coching.

(Image reduced; reproduced from The Philippine Comics Art Museum <<http://www.komikero.com/museum/coching01.html>>.)



FIGURE 30. Front cover of *Espesyal Komiks* 103, 17 September 1956, depicting a scene from the featured serial novel 'Kayumangging Krisantemo' (Brown Chrysanthemum), a love story written by Clodualdo del Mundo and illustrated by Fred Carrillo.

(Image reduced; reproduced from The Philippine Comics Art Museum < <http://www.komikero.com/museum/carrillo1.html>>.)



FIGURE 31. Front cover of *Pilipino Komiks* 67, 24 December 1949, illustrated by Tony Velasquez, featuring some of his popular characters. In the foreground is Ponyang Halobaybay in a Santa Claus outfit. Kenkoy is to her left, beating on a drum.

(Image reduced; reproduced from The Philippine Comics Art Museum <<http://www.komikero.com/museum/velasquez1.html>>.)

Kenkoy Komiks, launched in 1952, and the short-lived *Bisaya Komiks* (in Cebuano) in the 1950s.²⁵ Initially, the firm operated from the Liwayway Building in Manila. By 1955, it had transferred to its own premises in Mandaluyong (within Metro Manila) and had its own printing plant.²⁶ Many writers and illustrators made their names in the pages of the Ace Publications *komiks*.²⁷ Many firms were founded, too, in the wake of the company's success. Ace Publications opened the floodgate of comic book production in the Philippines.

Other publishers lost no time tapping into the market that Ace Publications had developed. Extra Komiks Publications, founded by Eriberto A. Tablan, launched *Extra Komiks* around 1949 or 1950 (after the first issue of *Tagalog Klasiks* but before that of *Hiwaga Komiks*). Tablan himself edited the title. In the late 1950s, the firm was sold to Philippine Book Publishing, which continued the publication of *Extra Komiks* and produced the new title *Romansa Komiks* under the editorial leadership of Ramon R. Marcelino, the former assistant editor of Tablan.²⁸ Around that same period, Bulaklak Publications of Beatriz Guballa, whose weekly magazine *Bulaklak* (Flower) was the closest rival of *Liwayway*, also started producing the comic books *Manila Klasiks* and *Bulaklak Express*. By the mid-1960s, the *komiks* titles of Philippine Book Publishing and Bulaklak Publications would no longer be in circulation.

²⁵ Noel Bejo, 'Komiks in the Philippines', in *Philippine Communication: An Introduction*, ed. by Crispin C. Maslog (Los Baños: Philippine Association of Communication Educators, 1988), pp. 179-94 (p. 181).

²⁶ Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', p. 12.

²⁷ Among them were Alfredo P. Alcala (illustrator), Larry Alcala (writer-illustrator), Fred Carrillo (illustrator), Francisco V. Coching (writer-illustrator), Clodualdo del Mundo (writer), Teny Henson (illustrator), Jim M. Fernandez (illustrator), Pablo S. Gomez (writer), Mars Ravelo (writer), the brothers Nestor and Virgilio P. Redondo (illustrators), Jesse F. Santos (illustrator), Dany Velasquez (writer), and Tony Zuñiga (illustrator), who became respected figures in the *komiks* business and gained loyal followers among the mass audiences.

²⁸ Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', p. 25.

The Roces titles themselves would cease to exist but only temporarily so. In 1961, Ace Publications was beset by labour problems. A strike forced the suspension of operations, and the firm was eventually shut down.²⁹ While the strike was still ongoing, however, Roces already had plans laid out for a new *komiks* publishing venture. On 1 August 1962, he set up Graphic Arts Services Inc (GASI). Tony Velasquez, who had resigned from Ace Publications, was appointed general manager and chief editor of the new firm; Dany Velasquez, who had his own advertising agency, was recruited as the assistant of his brother; Marcelino, from Philippine Book Publishing, was also hired to join the editorial team.³⁰ GASI launched comic book titles at a remarkable pace: *Kislap Komiks* appeared in September 1962, *Aliwan Komiks* in October, *Pioneer Komiks* in December, *Pinoy Komiks* in May 1963, *Pinoy Klasiks* in September, and *Holiday Komiks* shortly after.³¹ All the GASI titles were issued fortnightly and priced at thirty centavos (P0.30) per copy, cheaper still than the general magazines (*Liwayway*, for instance, was selling at forty centavos (P0.40) a copy in 1965). *Kislap Komiks* (Sparkle Comics) would be reformatted into a movie magazine in 1965 and would lead the line of non-*komiks* magazines produced by GASI, which included *Sports Flash*, *Movie Flash*, and *Women's Home Companion*. In 1969, GASI added *Teens Weekly* to its comic book line. It was *Aliwan Komiks* (Entertainment Comics) that would emerge as the centrepiece of all GASI publications. When it was launched, its print run was at 25,000 copies per issue; by 1966, the figure would be at 80,000.³²

Early in the 1960s, many other firms joined the comic book publishing business and put out their own series of titles in competition with the Roces line. Among the

²⁹ Corazon D. Villareal, 'Ang Industriya ng Komiks: Noon at Ngayon', *Kultura* 4.3 (1990), 47-55 (p. 48).

³⁰ Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', p. 35.

³¹ Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', p. 35.

³² Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', p. 35.

bigger outfits were Soller Publishing House, formerly a printing press, which produced *Filipino Thriller Komiks* and *Romantic Klasiks Magasin*; Gold Star Publishing House, which issued *Dalisay Komiks*, *Pag-Ibig Komiks*, *Sindak Komiks*, and *Teen-Age Komiks*; and Mapalad Publishing Corporation, formed by the bookseller-stationer-textbook publisher G. Miranda and Sons, which came out with *Diamante Komiks*, *Ditektib Komiks*, *Fantasia Komiks*, *Lagim Komiks* (later renamed *L'Amour Komiks*), *Ligaya Komiks*, *Sweethearts Komiks*, *Wakasan Komiks*, among other titles. The period also saw comic book writers and artists striking out on their own. In 1963, Pablo S. Gomez set up PSG Publishing House. Gomez was a prolific writer, whose novels were among the most popular with *komiks* readers. Many of his works were made into successful movies, which allowed him to claim one of the highest rates for film rights among *komiks* writers.³³ He had been an editor with Ace Publications as well as a contributing writer; he also had a brief stint with Gold Star Publishing House before establishing his own company. PSG Publishing House produced *United Komiks*, *Universal Komiks*, *Kidlat Komiks*, and *Continental Komiks*. The firm folded up in 1973, but Gomez continued writing novels for other comic book titles as well as scripts for television.³⁴ Also in 1963, the brothers Nestor and Virgilio P. Redondo, Tony Caravana, Alfredo P. Alcala, Jim M. Fernandez, and Amado Castrillo, all *komiks* artists and writers, established CRAF Publications. The firm put out two titles: *Redondo Komiks Magasin* and *Alcala Fight Komix Magasin*. In 1964, Fernandez organised his own company, Real Publications, which produced *Bolniks* and *Lindelmel Komiks*.³⁵ Both firms were short-lived ventures, lasting only a few years. The writers and artists behind them resumed contributing material

³³ Mario S. Cabling, *May Sining, Tagumpay at Salapi sa Pagsusulat ng Komiks* (Metro Manila: National Book Store, 1972), p. 101.

³⁴ Roxas and Arevalo, 'Filipino Scriptwriters and Artists', p. 76.

³⁵ Roxas and Arevalo, 'Filipino Scriptwriters and Artists', p. 92.

to other *komiks* publications, rejoined the Roces companies, or went on to work for American comic book publishers.

In 1964, *Pilipino Komiks* was revived by Roces under the new firm Pilipino Komiks, Inc (PKI). The editor of the title was one of the brightest stars in the business, Marcial (Mars) Ravelo, whose novels were immensely popular and their film versions equally successful. *Pilipino Komiks* had a print run of 67,866 copies per issue in 1966, a modest number compared to later figures.³⁶ The publication would quickly reclaim leadership in the market. PKI also resumed the publishing of the other original Ace Publications titles: *Espesyal Komiks*, *Huwaga Komiks*, and *Tagalog Klasiks*. The firm was eventually renamed Atlas Publishing Corporation, which went on to create many new titles for the market, such as *Darna Komiks*, *TSS Komiks*, *King Komiks*, and *Extra Special Comics*. The firm also published magazines and textbooks. Atlas Publishing would become the most prestigious of comic book publishers in the Philippines.

By the mid-1960s, the *komiks* business had grown into a thriving industry. There were fifty titles in circulation as of 30 June 1965, as registered with the Philippine Bureau of Posts.³⁷ Of this total, nine were published by Roces. The aggregate number of copies per print run of the fifty titles was at 1,343,206, according to a contemporary account.³⁸ The growth of Philippine comic book publishing was tied in some measure to the local cinema industry, which itself was flourishing during the 1960s. The first movie adapted from comic strips, a film based on 'Kenkoy', appeared in 1950. Since then, film producers had kept a keen eye on the *komiks* as a

³⁶ Circulation figure as reported in the 'Sworn Statement' filed with the Bureau of Posts for the registration of the publication as second-class matter, reproduced in *Pilipino Komiks* 473, 27 October 1966, p. 59.

³⁷ 'List of Second Class Publications Published in Greater Manila as of 30 June 1965', in *Philippine Mass Media in Perspective*, ed. by Gloria D. Feliciano and Crispulo J. Iban Jr (Quezon City: Capitol Publishing House, 1967), pp. 305-325.

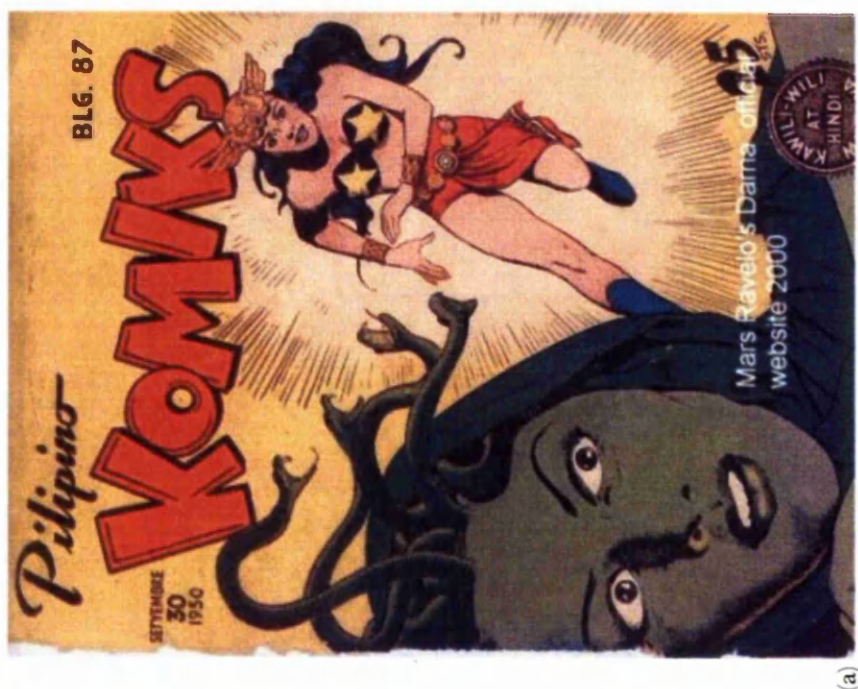
³⁸ Conchita Melchor-Hechanova, 'Our Comics Are No Laughing Matter', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 24 April 1966, pp. 28-30, repr. in *Philippine Comic Magazine*, pp. 59-63 (p. 61).

source of scripts; the serialised novels, in particular, served as a gold mine. Seemingly inexhaustible in this respect is Mars Ravelo's 'Darna' series, which first appeared in *Pilipino Komiks* on 13 May 1950 (FIGURE 32). Darna is the alter-ego of Narda, a simple provincial girl who swallows a magic pebble to transform into a stunning bikini-clad woman with supernatural powers. The superheroine Darna thwarts forces of evil such as the gorgon Valentina, the hawk woman Armida, and the tree monster Lucifera. Fourteen Darna movies were produced from 1951 to 1994, making Ravelo's series the most adapted into film among all other *komiks* texts. Portraying Darna, which is considered 'a career-defining role', has launched or secured the fame of many actresses.³⁹ Many other films based on comic book novels became box-office hits. By the 1970s, as a journalist observed, *komiks* writers were churning out serial novels that seemed predestined for movie screenplays.⁴⁰ Notable among such writers is Carlo J. Caparas, one of the most prolific *komiks* novelists, who at one point had thirty series running simultaneously.⁴¹ Caparas eventually became a major figure in the Philippine film industry as a writer, director, and producer. His *komiks* novel 'Ang Panday' (The Blacksmith) begs to be mentioned. It was an action-fantasy series about a humble blacksmith who battles all sorts of sinister beings with his magical sword. The series ran in *Pilipino Komiks* in the 1970s and was adapted into a film in 1978, which was followed by three sequels in the 1980s. All four films, starring Fernando Poe Jr as the blacksmith hero, were enormously successful. Panday was an immortal role for Poe, who became possibly the most popular star ever of Philippine cinema.

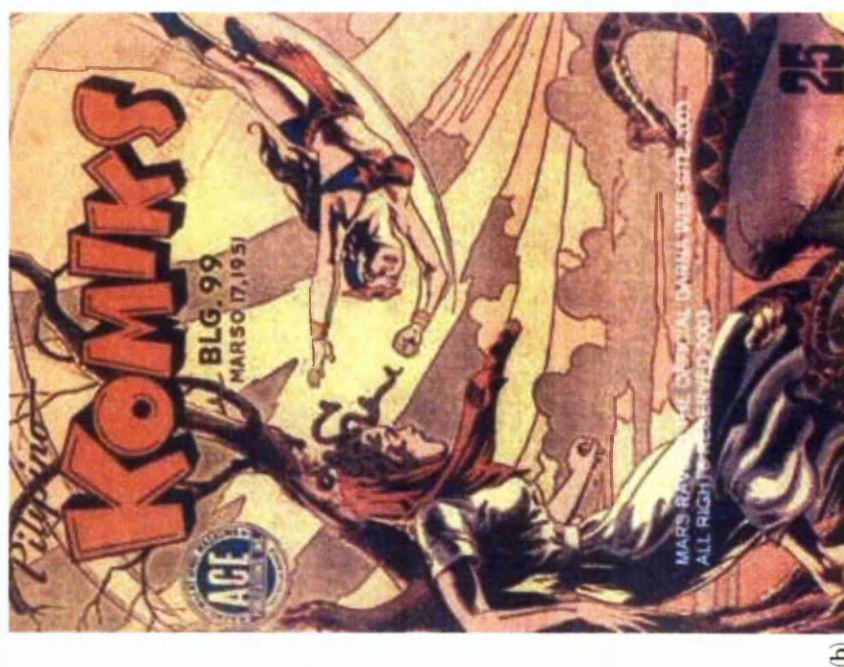
³⁹ Eric Cueto, 'Mars Ravelo's Darna The Superheroine', *The New Official Mars Ravelo's Darna Web Site* <<http://www.marsravelodarna.com/id1.html>> [accessed 11 July 2005]. Darna has also been adapted for television as a live series (1977, 2005) and as an animated series (1986) and onstage as modern ballet performances (1997, 2003).

⁴⁰ Mariano, p. 50.

⁴¹ Del Mundo, p. 181.



(a)



(b)

FIGURE 32. Front covers of *Pilipino Komiks* featuring Mars Ravelo's superheroine Darna and her nemesis Valentina: (a) issue number 87, published 30 September 1950, and (b) issue number 99, published 17 March 1951.
(Images reduced; reproduced from *The New Official Mars Ravelo's Darna Web Site* <<http://www.marsravelodarna.com/id17.html>>.)

His popularity led him to run for President of the country in 2004, but he was unsuccessful in his bid.⁴²

There is another facet to the link between the comic book and film industries in the Philippines. While the *komiks* provided characters and storylines for screenplays, cinema also supplied the publications with material for their pages. In the 1960s, movie columns started to appear as standard fare in the comic books. The publications then became vehicles not only of illustrated fiction but also of show business news and gossip; they served as venues for building or breaking the images of movie and television celebrities.⁴³ Some comic book titles, such as *Espesyal Komiks*, even began to highlight this by devoting its covers to photographs of the popular stars of the day, making the publications appear at first glance as movie magazines rather than comic books. It is interesting to note that the cover of the 17 July 1969 issue of *Espesyal Komiks* featured the portrait of the actor Joseph Estrada, whose image and popularity would take him to great heights beyond the realm of cinema. Estrada became President of the Philippines in 1998. The trend of featuring celebrities on comic book covers would continue well into the 1980s. Just as basing films on *komiks* novels came with some guarantee of box-office success for movie producers, carrying features on show business offered a promise of high sales for comic book publishers. Both comic books and movies were popular sources of entertainment and catered to the same mass audience. That a symbiotic relationship developed between the two forms seems to have been inevitable.

As the popularity of the *komiks* grew, so did the number and intensity of attacks the form received from its critics. During the 1960s, the rising crime and juvenile

⁴² Facing the media the day after Poe's death on 14 December 2004, his widow Susan Roces began her statement by declaring, 'Wala na si Panday' (The blacksmith is gone).

⁴³ Mariano, p. 49.

delinquency rates in Manila was frequently blamed on the proliferation of comic books depicting crime, violence, and horror. As early as 1960, a proposal prohibiting the sale of crime *komiks* was presented before the Manila municipal board by Councilor Sergio Loyola.⁴⁴ Similar stringent measures were recommended later by the Peace and Order Council, which comprised various religious, governmental, educational, and socio-civic groups.⁴⁵ Members of the *komiks* industry, as to be expected, were defensive. Writing in the *Sunday Times Magazine* in 1966, Ravelo declared that critics were 'barking up the wrong tree' as far as juvenile delinquency was concerned. Comic books were not to be blamed, he insisted, but rather 'crooked politicians, crooked public officials, crooked cops'.⁴⁶ While conceding that there were indeed 'bad' comic books in circulation, Ravelo maintained that they were of the minority and that efforts were being made to clean them up.⁴⁷ A system of self-censorship, in fact, operated within the *komiks* industry through the Association of Publishers and Editors of Philippine Comics Magazines (APEPCOM), which was organised in 1956. APEPCOM had laid down a set of rules, known as the 'Golden Code', governing the matters of presentation, dialogue, religion, costume, marriage and well-being, and citizenship in Filipino comic books.⁴⁸ But the code applied only to member publications, and APEPCOM really had no power over the publishers and editors outside its organisation.⁴⁹ Critical attacks, municipal proposals, and

⁴⁴ A. C. Florendo, 'I Lost It in the Komiks', *Home Life*, April 1972, pp. 20-3, repr. in *Philippine Comic Magazine*, pp. 85-92 (p. 90).

⁴⁵ Florendo, p. 90.

⁴⁶ 'The Serious Side of Humor Calls for a Clear-cut Criterion for our Comics', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 15 May 1966, pp. 14-6, repr. in *Philippine Comic Magazine*, pp. 64-7 (p. 67).

⁴⁷ Ravelo, p. 65.

⁴⁸ 'Self-censorship in Philippine Komiks', in *A History of Komiks*, pp. 55-7 (pp. 55-6).

⁴⁹ Florendo, p. 90.

prohibition measures notwithstanding, the *komiks* industry continued to grow. Politicians themselves would venture into the field to take advantage of the extensive reach of the comic book and its firm grasp on the consciousness of the Filipino masses. That the *komiks* was a powerful vehicle for influencing public opinion was no longer in dispute, and many candidates in the national elections of 1969 exploited this fact. They published comic books illustrating their lives, political platforms, and electoral promises, then distributed these publications to the public on the campaign trail.⁵⁰ In the meantime, outside the political arena, more new comic book publishing firms were formed; more new titles, both good and bad, were produced to meet the seemingly insatiable public demand.

In 1968, Roces undertook another revival, this time of the business entity Ace Publications. Marcelino transferred from GASI to become editor-in-chief of the firm. The new Ace Publications launched *Bondying Komeex* and *Kiss Komeex* that same year and *Hapi-Hapi Komiks* (later renamed *Happy Komiks*) in the next. *Kiss Komeex* was discontinued after several issues to give way to *Pogi Star Cinemagazine*, while *Bondying Komiks* was later reformatted into *Bondying Weekly Movie Specials*, with half of its contents devoted to illustrated stories and the other half to articles on show business.⁵¹ In 1970, Mars Ravelo, whose fame as a *komiks* writer was already legendary, broke away from the Roces enterprise. He established the RAR Publishing House, which produced *Ravelo Komiks*, *Kampeon Komiks*, *Teenworld*, and *18 Magazine*. Ravelo later acquired the weekly *Bulaklak* from the floundering Bulaklak Publications and re-issued the magazine as *Bulaklak at Paruparo* (Flower and Butterfly).⁵² While *Ravelo Komiks* and

⁵⁰ Reyes, 'Ilehitimong Panitikan', pp. 12-3.

⁵¹ Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', pp. 41-2.

⁵² Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', p. 25.

Kampeon Komiks carried illustrated stories, their contents consisted more of articles on film and television celebrities.⁵³ *Teenworld* and *Bulaklak at Paruparo* eventually evolved into full movie magazines. RAR Publications ceased operations in 1983 due in part to Ravelo's failing health. Also in 1970, a new comic book publishing firm was founded by another main player in the industry, Affiliated Publications Inc by Antonio S. Tenorio. Although nowhere near as famous as Ravelo, which no one else was for that matter, Tenorio had authored many successful *komiks* novels and had decades of experience in the business. He had been the editor-in-chief at Gomez's PSG Publishing House and, prior to that post, was the editor of the original Ace Publications's *Kenkoy Komiks*.⁵⁴ More than the other comic publishers, Affiliated Publications capitalised on the popularity of local film stars and designed its comic books to specifically cater to movie fans. The firm's initial title *Nora Aunor Entertainment Magazine*, first published in October 1970, was named after the rising star of the day. The singer-actress Nora Aunor, a poor provincial girl whose career was launched in 1968 when she won in an amateur singing contest, already had legions of fans ('Noranians') at that time. Her popularity would escalate to such a height that the title 'Superstar' would become hers alone in the Philippines. Early in 1971, Affiliated Publications released its second title, *Pip Entertainment Magazine*, named after Aunor's on-screen partner Tirso Cruz III whose nickname was 'Pip'. Both publications were instant successes, reflecting how *komiks* and cinema had become inextricable tied to each other. Affiliated Publications also produced the short-lived *Movie Idol Entertainment Weekly* and *Pilipino Reporter*, which based its material on news stories.⁵⁵ In

⁵³ Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', p. 27.

⁵⁴ Roxas and Arevalo, 'Filipino Scriptwriters and Artists', p. 123.

⁵⁵ Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', pp. 43-4.

1973, after the closing of PSG Publishing House, Affiliated Publications acquired the rights to Gomez's titles and added *United Komiks* and *Universal Komiks* to its list.

Roces raised his stake in the comic book business by forming yet another company in 1971. He established Adventures Illustrated Magazines, Inc with Damy Velasquez at the helm. On July that year, the firm launched *Adventure Komiks*, *Voodoo Komiks*, and *Love Story Illustrated Magazine*, the speciality of each made evident by their titles. *Adventure Komiks* and *Voodoo Komiks* lasted only several issues, but the success of *Love Story Illustrated Magazine* proved sufficient enough for the subsistence of the company.⁵⁶ Adventures Illustrated Magazines also published the magazine *Modern Romances and True Confessions*.

The early 1970s marked a period of change in the Roces companies as a new generation of managers were ushered in to guard if not further develop the position of the chain in the *komiks* industry. Roces kept his interests in the hands of family, with his two children heading the larger companies. Elena Roces Guerrero became president of GASI after Tony Velasquez retired in 1972. Meanwhile, Atlas Publishing fell under the leadership of Carmen Roces Davila. In later years, their sons, Alfredo R. Guerrero and Ramon R. Davila, would join the companies and supervise operations. Roces himself, however, remained involved in the businesses and loomed large as the prime mover.

With the comic book well established in the mainstream of popular entertainment and well proven as a highly profitable commodity, an underground movement within the *komiks* industry arose beginning in the late 1960s. This possibly had to do as well with the liberal ideas of the times that were filtering into the Philippines from America. Pornographic titles started to be published and hawked on the sly for as

⁵⁶ Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', p. 42.

high as three pesos (P3.00) per copy when legitimate titles were selling at thirty-five to forty-five centavos (P0.35-0.45) each.⁵⁷ The sexually explicit publications were known as the '*bomba komiks*' ('bomba' literally translates to 'bomb' but connotes stark nakedness); they bore provocative titles such as *Sexsee*, *Uhaw* (thirsty, literally), and *Toro* (a live sex act, in slang). They were, as one writer observed, 'the poor man's *Playboy*'.⁵⁸ In fact, their pin-up pictures were often lifted from the pages of *Playboy* itself and *Penthouse*.⁵⁹ Like the legitimate comic books, the pornographic titles were closely tied to the local cinema industry, which had its own underground production of *bomba* films. The *bomba komiks* interspersed vividly illustrated sex stories with photographic stills from smut films.⁶⁰ Needless to say, the publications sold briskly, much to the horror of the Church, the government, and the other usual moral watchdogs. By the early 1970s, around twenty pornographic titles were circulating surreptitiously while there were around eighty legitimate publications out in the market.⁶¹ It was Martial Law, declared on 21 September 1972, that finally curbed the illegitimate as well as the legitimate activities of the *komiks* industry. A total media clampdown was enforced initially under Marcos's military rule. By the time the presses were running again, the number of comic book titles in circulation had been drastically reduced to half, and all the *bomba komiks* had vanished.⁶²

Perhaps the legitimate comic book publishers may be considered as fortunate, for their businesses were not shut down or sequestered by Marcos as in the cases of some

⁵⁷ Florendo, p. 87.

⁵⁸ Federico Licsi Espino Jr, 'Sidewalk Sex', *Mirror*, 13 February 1971, p. 10, repr. in *Philippine Comic Magazine*, pp. 81-4 (p. 82).

⁵⁹ Espino, 'Sidewalk Sex', p. 82.

⁶⁰ Mariano, p. 49.

⁶¹ Florendo, p. 87.

⁶² Mayuga, p. 36.

privately owned newspapers and television and radio stations. But the remaining *komiks* publishers did have to submit to the control of the government in order to survive. Affiliated Publications, for instance, had to rename its titles, from *Nora Aunor Entertainment Magazine* to *Superstar Entertainment Magazine* and from *Pip Entertainment Magazine* to *Topstar Entertainment Magazine*, because the military frowned upon personality cults.⁶³ Upon the 'strong encouragement' of the Committee for Mass Media, which was based in Camp Aguinaldo (the headquarters of the Armed Forces of the Philippines), APEPCOM was re-organised into the Kapisanan ng mga Publisista at mga Patnugot ng mga Komiks-magasin sa Pilipino (KPPKP) in November 1972.⁶⁴ APEPCOM's 'Golden Code', which had thirty items, was replaced by a new forty-six-item list of guidelines, the first item being 'No material that will bring hatred or contempt, or incite disaffection towards the government as well as the various instrumentalities under it shall be published'.⁶⁵ The KPPKP guidelines included restrictions on the depiction of crime and war, the use of strong or foul language (with a list of prohibited 'vulgar' terms), and the presentation of 'horrifying creatures'. Nudity and sex, too, were covered by the guidelines: 'Nudity, or even near nudity, is prohibited' and 'Kissing and embracing should be depicted with extreme good taste. The sex act is totally prohibited'.⁶⁶ Comic book publishers found ways to work with or around the guidelines without sacrificing the popular appeal of their publications or the return of their investments.

Beyond censorship, the control of the Marcos government over the *komiks* industry extended to the utilisation of the publications for propaganda. The comic books were

⁶³ Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', p. 44.

⁶⁴ Mayuga, pp. 36-7. KPPKP is a direct translation of APEPCOM in Tagalog.

⁶⁵ 'Self-censorship in Philippine Komiks', pp. 56-7.

⁶⁶ 'Self-censorship in Philippine Komiks', p. 57.

made to carry stories that promoted the policies of the government or disseminated information on its developmental programmes, such as population control, the state housing project, the 'Green Revolution' (vegetable planting in home gardens), and the curbing of migration from the provinces to Manila.⁶⁷ Reyes notes that, in general, the stories were not popular 'partly because of the quality of the illustrations, partly because of the bluntness with which the developmental messages are delivered'.⁶⁸

During Martial Law, government control seems to have had less of an impact on the *komiks* industry than did the national economy, which was in a state of rapid decline. Smaller firms could not withstand the inflation of the peso and had to close shop, as in the cases of the publishing houses of Gomez and Ravelo. Or they had to sell out, as in Tenorio's Affiliated Publishers, which was sold to GASI in 1978 and became another link in the Roces chain. Ultimately, what transpired in comic book publishing was a case of the survival of the fittest: the *komiks* industry became concentrated in the hands of the big players, those who had the resources to weather the economic crises. Roces, for instance, not only acquired Affiliated Publications but even managed to establish the new firm Islas Filipinas Publishing, also in 1978, which produced the monthly *Pilipino Funny Komiks for Children*. Among other firms, Mapalad Publishing of G. Miranda and Sons also stayed afloat.

The economic difficulty of the period, however, did not result in the waning of production for the surviving comic book publishers. When it had recovered from the shock of the imposition of Martial Law, the *komiks* industry picked up from where it left off and went on to thrive once again. Circulation figures remained astounding. For instance, during the period of October 1974 to June 1975, *Pilipino Komiks* was

⁶⁷ Reyes, 'The Philippine Komiks', p. 178.

⁶⁸ Reyes, 'The Philippine Komiks', p. 178.

being published weekly at 136,956 copies per issue.⁶⁹ It was the leading comic book of the day, with a print run surpassing even that of the newspaper *Philippine Daily Express*, which had the second highest circulation rate among the dailies, at 125,111.⁷⁰ The numbers rose further for the *komiks* in succeeding years. From 1977 to 1978, the leading titles and their print runs were: *Pilipino Komiks* at 144,616 copies per issue; *Aliwan Komiks* at 139,755; *Tagalog Klasiks* at 134,756; *Hiwaga Komiks* at 129,372; and *Espesyal Komiks* at 109,814.⁷¹ The top-five publications were all weeklies, all published by Roces companies. It is evident that the prevailing conditions in the country—the dictatorial rule of Marcos, the economic instability, the social unrest—did not adversely affect the appetite of the Filipino public for comic books. Perhaps the hunger was even intensified by the difficulties of the times. The *komiks*, after all, offered possibly the best and certainly the cheapest kind of escapist entertainment.

In 1978, the new company Rex Publications joined the *komiks* industry. The firm, like Mapalad Publishing, was an offshoot of an enterprise that was involved in textbook publishing (Rex Printing Company) and bookselling (Rex Book Store). It could afford to be a big player in the comic book business. For the production of its line of comic books, the company engaged the services of *komiks* veterans Carmelo Y. Reyes, Fernandez, and Tenorio, each affiliated with the Roces companies at one point or another.⁷² Rex Publications launched *Rex Komiks* and *Astro Komiks* in 1978, followed

⁶⁹ Circulation figure based on findings of the Audit Council of the Association of Philippine Advertising Agencies-Philippine Association of National Advertisers, in *Book of the Philippines 1976*, p. 286.

⁷⁰ *Book of the Philippines 1976*, p. 284. The leading daily was *Bulletin Today*, with a circulation rate of 219,111 copies per issue. Both *Bulletin Today* and *Philippine Daily Express* were run by Marcos cronies. There was little competition from other newspapers. Even after the lifting of the Martial Law media ban, many publishers did not or could not resume operations, for Marcos kept a stern eye and a firm grip on the media.

⁷¹ Circulation figures based on the report of the Audit Council for Media, in Bejo, p. 187.

⁷² Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', p. 26.

by *Tapusan Komiks*, *Gem Komiks*, and *Marvel Komiks* in 1979. Later, five more titles were added to its list: *Honey*, *Pag-Ibig*, *Relax*, *Darling*, and *Luw Komiks*.

It appears that Rex Publications was the last of the big players, or the legitimate publishers, to enter the *komiks* industry. There was a new title launched in 1980, *Gospel Komiks*, but it was hardly a typical comic book and its publisher Communication Asia Foundation (CAF) had other interests than comic book publishing. CAF was a religious organisation involved in media development and research; it also published non-fiction books and occasionally produced films. *Gospel Komiks* was a bilingual (English-Filipino) monthly meant 'to provide points for discussion for lay leaders and community workers'.⁷³ Early in the 1980s, other new *komiks* titles appeared, which marked the revival of the underground publishing of pornographic comic books. The publications, known as '*bold komiks*', were descendants of the *bomba komiks* and bore even more racy titles such as *Climax*, *Instant Wet*, and *Boobs*. Some twenty-four titles were circulating in the mid-1980s.⁷⁴ Atlas Publishing countered the underground movement by prominently displaying on its *komiks* covers the stamp declaring 'WHOLESOME FAMILY READING MATERIAL HINDI [NOT] PORNO'. Few of the *bold komiks* survived the anti-smut campaigns launched by various groups and institutions, most notably Manila City Hall under Mayor Ramon Bagatsing.

In 1986, as del Mundo reports, the *komiks* industry was made up of ten publishing firms that collectively produced forty-seven comic book titles (excluding educational, religious, and pornographic titles). Nearly all the publications appeared weekly. The most popular ones—*Aliwan Komiks*, *Extra Komiks*, *Hiwaga Komiks*, *Pilipino Komiks*, and *Wakasan Komiks*—came out twice a week. The comic books sold typically at two pesos

⁷³ Bejo, p. 187. In 1982, *Gospel Komiks* was adapted for school use. Its initial circulation 50,000 copies per issue rose to 300,000 (50,000 of which was in Cebuano) by 1988. It was distributed mainly by Catholic schools and parishes.

⁷⁴ Del Mundo, pp. 183-4.

and twenty-five centavos (P2.25) per copy. Each comic book was presumably read by at least six people. With the aggregate circulation of the forty-seven titles estimated at 2,500,000 to 3,000,000 per week, the comic books reached around 15,000,000 to 18,000,000 Filipinos—or one-third of the Philippine population.⁷⁵

The numbers are indeed awesome. But perhaps more astounding is the fact that virtually one figure was behind the industry that involved millions of copies, readers, and pesos. Of the forty-seven *komiks* titles published by the ten firms, eleven titles were by Atlas Publishing, twelve by GASI, three by Ace Publications, five by Affiliated Publications, one by Adventures Illustrated Magazines, and one by Islas Filipinas Publishing—in other words, thirty-three titles were published by the six companies of Ramon Roces.⁷⁶

Onboard a ferry running between the Visayan cities of Bacolod and Iloilo (in central Philippines), some time in 1967, an editor of a local weekly was witness to a revelation:

After all the passengers—numbering over a hundred—had settled in their chairs for the [two-hour] trip, the editor began to scan the deck to see what newspapers and magazines were popular among them. To his surprise, every other person was reading a comic book. Only two were leafing curiously through a local weekly magazine. One man was reading a crime story in a morning daily.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Del Mundo, p. 179.

⁷⁶ Del Mundo, p. 183. Atlas Publishing and GASI were the most successful among Roces's firms and indeed among all comic book publishers in the Philippines. In 1986, both Roces companies ranked among the top 1000 in the country (based on net sales): Atlas stood at number 580 with net sales of P86,117,00; GASI at 590, with P84,841,00, according to *Philippines' Best 1000 Corporations* (Manila: Mahal Kong Pilipinas Foundation, 1987), pp. 62, 339, 349.

⁷⁷ Leon O. Ty, 'Periodicals', in *Philippine Mass Media in Perspective*, pp. 23-35 (pp. 31-2).

The observation of the editor illustrates two aspects unique to the *komiks* as a Philippine literary publication: first, its popularity extended well beyond Manila; and second, reading comic books had become built into the ordinary activities of Filipinos. These aspects are particularly significant considering that the trends and customs in Manila are not always shared by the areas outside the capital city, even those nearby within Luzon (in northern Philippines), for they had their own brands of culture and their own languages or dialects. Furthermore, reading literature or entertaining material in public, be it on transport or elsewhere, is generally not common in the Philippines. The revelation for the editor on the ferry ultimately tells of the massive reach and appeal of the *komiks*.

In the Philippines, contrary to what might be expected of the form, the comic book attracted a readership that was not limited to children. *Komiks* publishers, it seems, paid little attention to children as a market sector. In the 1960s, there were local reprints and translations of Walt Disney publications circulating in the market—*Walt Disney Comics and Stories*, *Walt Disney Espesyal Komiks*, and *Walt Disney Komiks Tagalog Edition*—but they were not successful and thus did not last long. According to Roxas and Arevalo, Filipino children could not relate to Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck because they used the American idiom and reflected the American way of life.⁷⁸ It was only in 1978, with the launching of Islas Filipinas Publishing's *Pilipino Funny Komiks for Children*, that there emerged an original local title specifically produced for children. Prior to that, and perhaps even after, children read the same comic books that their elder siblings or their parents did.

According to the Media Exposure Survey conducted by the Philippine Mass Communications Research Society in 1982, the majority of comic book readers in the

⁷⁸ 'The Birth of the Philippine Komiks', p. 45.

Greater Manila Area were from 20 to 34 years old, females, with high school degrees, and from the lower classes.⁷⁹ Readership in the Greater Cebu Area, the second largest urban centre after Manila, displayed more or less a similar pattern. Table 3 below provides further details on the profile of comic book readers in the urban centres.

TABLE 3. Profile of comic book readers in the Greater Manila and Cebu Areas, according to the Philippine Mass Communications Research Society Media Exposure Survey (1982)

	GREATER MANILA AREA	GREATER CEBU AREA
AGE GROUP (YEARS)	PER CENT	PER CENT
15-19	25	23
20-34	53	52
35-49	17	21
50 and over	5	4
GENDER		
Female	54	60
Male	46	40
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT		
No formal education	1	0
Elementary or less	13	15
Some high school/vocational/technical	15	29
Completed high school	29	6
Some university	25	29
Completed university	16	20
Postgraduate studies	1	0
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS		
Upper class	5	0
Middle class	43	58
Lower class	52	41

SOURCE: *Philippine Almanac 1986*, p. 494.

The appeal of the *komiks* was all-encompassing. Among its fans, as Reyes points out, were not only housemaids and houseboys or drivers and salesgirls but also students, teachers, doctors, and people who had nothing better to do, who were from the humblest abodes in the squatter areas to the posh houses in the exclusive residential subdivisions.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ *Philippine Almanac: Book of Facts 1986 Edition* ([Quezon City]: Aurora Publications, 1986), p. 494.

⁸⁰ 'Hindi lamang mga tsimay at tsimoy, mga drayber at tindera ang masusugid na mambabasa ng komiks. Mga estudyante..., mga propesyonal (guro, doctor), mga taong walang magawa (mula sa pinakaabang na tirahan ng mga iskwatir hanggang sa magagarang bahay sa mga subdibisyon) ang ilan lamang sa panatikong tagabili nito'. 'Lehitimong Panitikan', p. 67.

The drawing power of the Filipino comic book lay in its accessibility. In part, this had to do with the type of reading material it offered. The *komiks* stories were, in a sense, familiar. The narratives on love, adventure, and fantasy, in particular, carried on the tradition of popular literary forms of the past—the metrical romances (*awits* and *corridos*) of the Spanish colonial period and the first decades of the twentieth century, and the Tagalog novels of the first half of the twentieth century—by bearing the same stereotypical characters, incredible turn of events, sentimentality, and happy endings. The *awits* and *corridos* actually served as sources of material: many old titles were reworked as illustrated series, *Doce Pares de Francia* (Twelve Peers of France) and *Siete Infantes de Lara* (Seven Infants of Lara) for example. In general, like the traditional forms, the *komiks* stories provided escapist entertainment for the Filipino masses. As the writer Federico Licsi Espino Jr put it, the sole purpose of the publications was

to give a scintilla of excitement and romance to unlovely, lackluster lives. For the middle class spinsters whose love life is arid and barren, for the poor fishwife thrashing in financial straits, for the teen-age girl on the threshold of romance, for the poverty-stricken *lavandera* who needs a respite from the tedium of washing other people's dirty linen, for the equally penurious *planchadora* who must iron out the kinks in the wardrobe of the affluent, for the harried sidewalk vendor who lives in the slums, the comics provide packaged excitement, canned romance, a splash of fantastic colors.⁸¹

The use of language in the *komiks* is another factor behind the accessibility of the publications. The written word in the comic books was simple and straightforward, in

⁸¹ Espino, 'The Philosophy of Escapism', p. 119. Espino observed further that, 'As long as there are people who lead drab and dreary lives, the comics will continue luring Filipino readers into its Never-Never Land peopled by Pinays [Filipinas] sporting gorgon's head [*sic*], sex-starved fat ladies in an emotional circus replete with touches of occultism, carnivorous South American piranhas finding their way into the Pasig River [the main waterway in Metro Manila], Greek centaurs losing their way and ending up in a Philippine barrio, local Tarzans with names like Alazan or Hagibis, alluring femme-femmes suffering from the aswang [she-monster in native folklore] syndrome, in short, all the fanciful characters that a lively and colorful imagination can think of' (p. 122).

the style of everyday speech. In this manner, the publications departed from the metrical romances and traditional novels, which tended to be verbose and to use highly stylised language. Text in the *komiks* appeared in the dialogue balloons and the occasional boxes in which settings or scenes were described briefly; the vivid illustrations told the rest of the story. This synthesis of text and graphics made the comic books easy to read and understand even by, as some critics note, the semi-literate. As one avid reader describes the *komiks*, ‘Hindi nakakasakit ng ulong basahin’ (Reading it does not give you a headache).⁸² That the comic books were just as popular in the northern city of Iloilo and the southern city of Jolo as in every other district in Manila attests to its readability.⁸³ What is particularly remarkable in this respect, considering that there are more than one hundred dialects and languages in the Philippines, is that the *komiks* were all published in Tagalog. There appears to have been only two efforts at producing non-Tagalog titles: *Bisaya Komiks* in the 1950s and a version of *Gospel Komiks* in the late 1980s, both in Cebuano. *Gospel Komiks* catered to a specific audience and served educational and religious purposes, so it was not a standard publication. As for *Bisaya Komiks*, perhaps it is telling that it turned out to be short-lived. It was Tagalog—or more specifically the variety of the language used in the streets of Manila—that was the ‘official’ medium of the *komiks*. Evidently, it was the language even the non-Tagalog speaking Filipinos preferred in or had come to expect from the *komiks*. In fact, the publications served as an alternative source of language instruction for non-Tagalogs. The scholar Edilberto N. Alegre, whose primary language is Iloko, recalls in the essay ‘How I Truly Learned Tagalog’ that his

⁸² Mariano, p. 45.

⁸³ Mariano, p. 45.

‘first happy experience in reading Tagalog’ involved the ‘DI-13’ series in *Pilipino Komiks*.⁸⁴ As for the journalist A. C. Florendo, he claims,

Personally, I hold komiks in certain respect and esteem for teaching me my Tagalog better than did my instructors in elementary and high school. And a lot more color in language, too. “Askad naman, erap. Mukhang datan ‘yung bebot na inirereto mo sa akin. Dyahi sa mga choks.” [‘Sod it, mate. That chick you’re setting me up with looks like an old cow. I’d be embarrassed with the blokes’.] They don’t teach you to speak like that in school.⁸⁵

Finally, the accessibility of *komiks* was due in no small measure to its price. The publications were cheap, and they were made even more so by being rented out in marketplaces, *sari-sari* stores (corner shops), and even newsstands in cities and towns. In 1978, for instance, when comic books were selling typically at eighty-five centavos (P0.85) per copy, rental fees ranged from ten to fifteen centavos (P0.10-0.15) per title, per sitting.⁸⁶ At that time, the minimum daily wage ranged from seven to eleven pesos (P7-11).⁸⁷ When the *komiks* were instead bought and brought home, they were readily passed on to other readers in the family or the neighbourhood because the publications were inexpensive anyway, or they were exchanged for other titles of fellow *komiks* owners. Thus, a system of distribution existed beyond the networks of the publishers, and this served to further extend the reach of comic books among Filipinos.

⁸⁴ In *Pinoy Forever: Essays on Culture and Language* (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, 1993), pp. 80-3 (p. 82). Alegre aspired to write in Tagalog and found that the *komiks* did not teach him all that he wanted. ‘I would have ended up writing essays comics-style’, he says. Eventually, he turned to reading *Livawayway*.

⁸⁵ p. 85.

⁸⁶ Mariano, p. 42.

⁸⁷ Presidential Decree 1389, 1 July 1978, in ‘Summary of Wage Legislations’.

The overwhelming production and reception of comic books from the 1960s to the 1980s might suggest that all other literary activity was dormant during the period, which was not the case. Traditional fiction (without illustrations, that is) was still being produced. The weekly magazines continued to feature serialised novels and short stories (while generally carrying *komiks* material at the same time). Novels continued to be published as books. In the 1960s, eleven new titles in Tagalog appeared and at least fourteen in English; in the 1970s, at least seven in Tagalog and at least six in English; and in the 1980s, at least seventeen in Tagalog (eight of which were translations of novels by Asian writers) and at least twenty-seven in English. This is an incomplete picture of novel publishing during the period; more titles were possibly produced. But whatever the exact figures are, it may well be assumed that they came nowhere near the output of the *komiks*. It may also be supposed that the novels, whether in Tagalog or English, did not serve as popular reading material. Some Tagalog titles, notably Amado V. Hernandez's *Mga Ibong Mandaragit* (Birds of Prey, 1969), were serious works that dealt with socio-political themes.⁸⁸ As such, they departed from the long-established formula behind every popular or commercially successful Tagalog novel. This formula placed entertainment value above any other element, be it aesthetic or social-political-historical relevance. As for the novels in English, like all other Filipino literature written in the language, they appealed to a very limited audience, one that was generally made up of university students, nationalistic intellectuals, and the writers in English themselves. For Filipinos who preferred reading in English, those from the higher classes or those with better educations whose sensibilities were more Western than native, popular literature usually consisted of imported novels and magazines. Some of these readers found the

⁸⁸ While Hernandez's *Mga Ibong Mandaragit* was no bestseller in its day, it received critical acclaim and eventually found its way into the reading lists of schools and universities. For this reason, the novel has remained in print.

komiks beneath their taste or intelligence and their social status or affectations of such. Instead they read Mills & Boon titles or Barbara Cartland's novels or Ian Fleming's James Bond series. As Reyes observes, convent-school girls or bored matrons considered such reading more sophisticated than the *komiks*. But, she declares, what they are not aware of is that these books are just as lowbrow but do not seem so because they are in English.⁸⁹ Such was the 'great divide' existing in Philippine society, between the higher (upper and middle) and the lower classes, that it was not unheard of for parents in more affluent families to forbid their children from reading the *komiks* of their household maids or drivers. The comic books these children were allowed to read, if at all, were imported titles like *Superman* and *Batman* or *The Adventures of Tintin* and *Asterix*, which they sometimes swapped with friends or even rented out to neighbours or classmates, no different from what some children on the other side of the social and cultural divide did with their *komiks*.

All the other local and foreign literary publications appear as mere background details in the Philippine literary landscape during the decades of the 1960s to 1980s, for large and imposing at the foreground is the comic book. How the *komiks* became the literary bestsellers of the day is as much a question of how Ramon Roces came to occupy such a vital position in the industry. What kept Roces in the lead? How did he run his companies? How did he produce, distribute, and promote his comic books?

That Roces would dominate the *komiks* business or at least succeed splendidly in it seems to have been a foregone conclusion. When he ventured into comic book publishing, Roces possessed advantages that none of the other publishers had:

⁸⁹ 'Para sa mga kolehiyala o kaya sa walang magawang matrona higit na 'class' basahin ang mga nobela sa serye ng Mills and Boon o kaya nama'y ang pinakahuling nobela ni Barbara Cartland; o Fleming. Hindi lamang nila alam na 'bakya' din itong napili nilang pag-aksayahan ng panahon. Kaya lamang hindi halata ... ay dahil isinulat sa Ingles'. 'Ilehitimong Panitikan', p. 67.

membership in one of the most prominent families of Philippine society, over two decades of experience in magazine publishing, and outstanding accomplishment in that area. Roces had the printing machinery and materials, whose suppliers he had long-standing relationships with; a widespread and efficient system of distribution, with a network of loyal agents and sub-agents; and seemingly unlimited capital—all the resources necessary to launch not just a publishing project but an empire. Or another one, in Roces's case.⁹⁰

In the early days of comic book publishing in the Philippines, there existed a club mentality among *komiks* editors, writers, and artists. As a journalist noted, 'you just didn't make it if you didn't belong to the club'.⁹¹ Among those in the elite group were the Velasquez brothers and Clodualdo del Mundo joined later by Marcelino, Tenorio, Gomez, and Ravelo—all Roces men, who spent their entire careers with or launched their reputations through one or another of the Roces companies. That this club fell under the wing of Roces, along with the other best talents in the business whether as permanent employees or as contractual contributors, was crucial to his success in the *komiks* industry. He was able to produce comic books with quality writing and illustrations, which set the standard for other *komiks* publishers. Because he could afford to keep the best writers and illustrators contributing to his titles, with some even granted exclusive contracts, Roces also set the standard for talent fees. During the early years of the *komiks*, when copies were selling at twenty-five centavos (P0.25) each, first-rank writers and illustrators were paid around twenty-five pesos

⁹⁰ Aside from magazine and comic book publishing, Roces was also involved in other businesses such as concrete products and plywood manufacturing, and industrial printing and packaging. D. H. Soriano and others, *The Roces Family Publishers (With a History of the Philippine Press)* (Quezon City: Islas Filipinas Publishing, 1987), p. 63.

⁹¹ Ros H. Matienzo, 'Ravelo Iconoclast', c.1970s, repr. in 'Mars Ravelo', *The New Official Mars Ravelo's Darna Web Site* <<http://www.marsravelodarna.com/id15.html>> [accessed 11 July 2005].

(P25) per page.⁹² The bar raised by Roces in comic book publishing was one that other publishers could not always reach. At the same time, Roces kept the prices of comic books low since his titles were published in massive numbers. The economy of scale allowed him to produce comic books at the cheapest possible price, which also became the industry guide.⁹³

With the growth of the *komiks* business came the rise in talent fees of comic book writers and illustrators. They were able not only to get by but also to thrive on their incomes. Film rights contributed further to the prosperity of the writers. In the early 1970s, a writer could earn as much as fifteen thousand pesos (P15,000), sometimes even more, if his/her novel were picked up for production by a studio.⁹⁴ As Mario S. Cabling remarked of his fellow *komiks* writers in 1972: It is possible now for some to have cars, send their children to exclusive schools, own land, build beautiful houses, and dine and dress however they desire.⁹⁵ Meanwhile, as Espino wryly observed, 'the serious man of letters [was] starving'.⁹⁶ The writer-publisher Alberto S. Florentino, for instance, was so hard up at one point that even his refrigerator was nearly repossessed.⁹⁷

Aside from all his advantages, Roces obviously also possessed an enterprising spirit. His companies set trends in Philippine printing and publishing. GASI, for instance, became the pioneer in colour separation processing when it acquired electronic

⁹² Del Mundo, p. 183.

⁹³ Del Mundo, p. 184.

⁹⁴ Cabling, p. 99.

⁹⁵ 'Nangyayaring may mga manunulat ngayon na ... may mga kotse na rin, nakapagpapaaral ng mga anak sa mga piling aralan, nagmamay-ari ng mga lupain, nakapagtatayo ng mararangyang tahanan at nakakain at nakapagbibihis ng anumang magustuhan'. p. 97.

⁹⁶ Espino, 'The Philosophy of Escapism', p. 122.

⁹⁷ Alberto Florentino, 'Komadrona to a Native Literature', *Pilipinas*, 35 (Autumn 2000), p. 10, repr, in *Pilipinas EJournal* <<http://www.uws.edu.au/social/pilipinas/florentino.pdf>> [accessed 7 February 2003].

colour-separation scanners early in 1965.⁹⁸ Ramon Roces Publications initiated the publishing of comic strips in the vernacular weeklies, as mentioned earlier. In comic book publishing, the inclusion of movie columns as regular features started with the titles of the original Ace Publications. Incidentally, the founding of APEPCOM was also an initiative of the firm; the rules laid out by the Ace Publications editors to raise and maintain the quality of their titles became APEPCOM's 'Golden Code'.⁹⁹

Roces, too, had an acute business sense, and perhaps this is what is most fascinating about him as an entrepreneur. He protected his investment and involvement in comic book publishing by forming several firms—each a corporate entity in itself with its own employees, products, and income. This was a clever strategy, for any untoward event could paralyse operations or cease it altogether, as did the labourers' strike at Ace Publications in 1961. Villareal notes that such a situation would then be an opportunity for the competition to enter or improve their position in the market.¹⁰⁰ With his interests spread out, Roces was assured of a constant presence in the *komiks* industry. Having several smaller companies, rather than a single giant enterprise, perhaps also allowed him to better keep his employees in line. No strike was ever again launched at any of the Roces firms.¹⁰¹

Roces was just as shrewd with the distribution of his publications. His firms had around 300 agents all over the country, many of whom had been distributing his comic books since he began publishing them in 1947 or possibly his weekly magazines

⁹⁸ Soriano, p. 84.

⁹⁹ 'Self-censorship in Philippine Komiks', p. 55.

¹⁰⁰ p. 50.

¹⁰¹ Villareal, p. 50. Roces may have been tough businessman, but he evidently had a streak of altruism too. Atlas Publishing, for instance, ran a scholarship program for underprivileged Filipinos. In the mid-1980s, there were around fifty 'Atlas Scholars', who were registered in various technical and vocational courses. Some Atlas Scholars eventually found employment with the companies of Roces. Roxas and Arevalo, 'The Birth of Philippine Komiks', p. 32.

even before World War II.¹⁰² These agents had their own network of sub-agents, who in turn distributed the publications to vendors. According to Villareal, the transactions between the Roces firms and their agents generally involved cash; credit was seldom granted, only to agents who were especially trusted and only for brief periods of time (from one day to one month). The agents acquired their copies at a discount, from 22 to 33 per cent less than the listed retail price in GASI's case, but they were not allowed to return unsold copies unless there were extraordinary circumstances, a destructive typhoon for instance. The sub-agents usually paid the agents in cash as well.¹⁰³ For the Roces firms then, revenue came pouring in almost as soon as their titles came rolling out of the presses. Other publishers, particularly the small and independent firms, could only fantasize about such state of affairs. Some of them had no choice but to deal directly with sub-agents and to offer terms of credit and the privilege to return unsold copies—a system that often resulted in losses.¹⁰⁴

In developing and promoting his titles, Roces was equally astute, his efforts at staying in touch with his audience unrelenting. Atlas Publishing, for instance, claimed to answer all fan mail with queries on definitions of Tagalog words used in their titles.¹⁰⁵ But more than that, the Roces firms did their own market research: on a regular basis, they monitored the circulation and sales of their titles, and conducted surveys on the preferences of *komiks* readers, with questions as specific as which serial novels they followed, what type of stories they enjoyed, or who their favourite writers and artists were.¹⁰⁶ In this way, Roces kept his finger on the pulse of the masses. His

¹⁰² Villareal, p. 51.

¹⁰³ Villareal, p. 51.

¹⁰⁴ Villareal, pp. 51-2.

¹⁰⁵ Mayuga, p. 39.

¹⁰⁶ Villareal, p. 53.

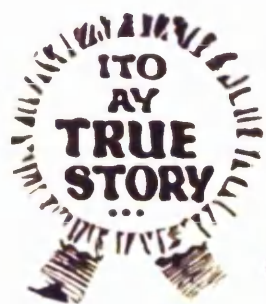
firms used the results of market research as bases for decisions on the launching, reformatting, or discontinuation of their comic book titles.¹⁰⁷ The Roces publications, in effect, gave *komiks* readers exactly what they wanted. Furthermore, the titles were made even more attractive by the contests the publishers regularly ran, each involving no great effort on the part of the entrants and each offering fairly generous cash prizes. As an *Aliwan Komiks* issue enticed its readers to join one the GASI contests, ‘Kumita Habang Naglilibang!’ (Earn while being entertained!).¹⁰⁸ The contests were various, from the best question-and-answer on trivia to the cheapest recipe for a simple dish to the best explanation on one’s favourite *komiks* novel. Contestants typically had to cut out a coupon from the comic book that held the contest and post it to the publisher along with their entry. Each contestant could send as many entries as desired just as long the coupons came with them. The contests clearly served as a strategy for the Roces firms to encourage their audience not only to purchase their titles but also to buy several copies per issue if possible. Finally, one other promotional device that Roces employed was welcoming readers to send in their own life stories for possible adaptation into *komiks* novels or short stories. *Aliwan Komiks*, for one, often presented ‘true story’ features in their pages (FIGURE 33). *Pilipino Funny Komiks for Children* also published drawings submitted by their readers and photographs of children sent in by their parents.¹⁰⁹ This strategy not only served to entice readers whose contributions were printed to buy as many copies as possible (for distribution to family and friends) but also to provide the editorial desks with new materials.

In the mid-1980s, while the production of comic books was rising, the quality of the publications was declining. Of the *komiks* industry, del Mundo observed, ‘The

¹⁰⁷ Villareal, p. 53.

¹⁰⁸ *Aliwan Komiks* 1, 29 October 1962, p. 25.

¹⁰⁹ Roxas and Arevalo, ‘The Birth of the Philippine Komiks’, p. 46.



SA IBANG KANDUNGAN..

SINULAT NI
GREG IGNA DE DIOS

Guhit ni
E. R. Cruz

NI JUAN TUMANENG
VERGEL STREET
PASAY CITY



Kapag uyong
mahal ang
isang nilikha.
Maaatim mo
sang suya ay
lumuha?

SLG, 61

AKO AY PULIS SA ISANG KARATIG-BAYAN,
KUYA GREG.



HEY, JOHNNY!
HALIKA, MAY
TROBOL NA NA-
MAN PAW SA
HIGHWAY!

AY KAGULUHAN SA NASABING BAYAN,
KAYA MADALAS NA MASABAK AKO SA
PANGANIB.



FIGURE 33. Page from a series in *Aliwan Komiks* 253, 26 June 1972, adapted from the contribution of the reader Juan Tumaneng of Vergel Street, Pasay City. The seal on the upper left corner declares 'ITO AY [THIS IS A] TRUE STORY'. The series is entitled 'Sa Ibang Kandungan..' (In the Arms of Another..), written by Greg Igna de Dios and illustrated by E. R. Cruz.

(Image reduced; reproduced from The Philippine Comics Art Museum <<http://www.komikero.com/museum/ercruz01.html>>.)

excitement is no longer there; the passion has been replaced by a more practical need to survive'.¹¹⁰ The concentration of production in the hands of 'brand name' talents that marked the early years of the *komiks* continued to exist and was serving to the detriment of the industry given that more titles were being published during the period. The most popular writers and artists were spread thin, handling several series simultaneously with weekly or twice-weekly deadlines to beat. For instance, the writers Elena Patron, Nerissa Cabral, and Gilda Olvidado, who made their reputations out of creating some of the weepiest melodramas and most romantic love stories that ever graced the *komiks* pages, each had fourteen serial novels running at the same time.¹¹¹ Among the artists, Mar T. Santana had his desk fullest, producing illustrations for seventeen series appearing concurrently, four of which he was authoring too.¹¹² According to del Mundo, the quality of the *komiks* of the day had also taken a backseat as other publishers tried to break into the Roces-controlled industry. In order to match the low prices of the Roces titles, the other publishers had to produce their comic books in the most inexpensive way possible, which inevitably involved relying on cheap, no-name, not-so-talented writers and artists.¹¹³

In the late 1980s, the *komiks* was outranked only by radio in terms of reception and popularity; television, film, newspapers, and magazines fell behind the comic books.¹¹⁴ But the form would not be able to sustain this position in the following decades. Perhaps the declaration of a young boy in 1972 was prophetic. Asked by a journalist

¹¹⁰ Del Mundo, p. 183.

¹¹¹ Del Mundo, p. 180.

¹¹² Del Mundo, p. 181.

¹¹³ Del Mundo, p. 185.

¹¹⁴ Philippine Information Agency media survey cited in Villareal, p. 47.

if he reads comic books, he answered, 'Why bother? I like it better on TV'.¹¹⁵

Television would surpass the *komiks* in reach and popularity (radio would maintain the lead among all forms of mass media).¹¹⁶ The consistent rise in the total number of television sets owned by Filipinos is revealing: in 1975, the figure was at 756,000; in 1985, 1,500,000; and in 1995, 3,300,000.¹¹⁷ In the 1990s, the Filipino masses would watch television more than read comic books or—it goes without saying—any other entertaining printed matter. But a new kind of publication would emerge and fast gain a following. Romance novels began to be published in the mid-1980s—in lesser numbers than the *komiks*, to be sure, but in remarkable figures nonetheless for local fiction that came without illustrations. The novels were written in Taglish, the hybrid of Tagalog and English used in Manila and the emerging informal lingua franca throughout the country. They would become the new popular source of escapist entertainment for those who still chose to read for pleasure. Comic books continue to be published to this day, but the publications are poor relations of their forebears. At its prime, *Pilipino Komiks* was published in 60 pages and featured at least nine serial novels. Its descendant today *Pilipino Illustrated Stories* is a thin title of 32 pages with no novels, printed with the cheapest kind of ink on the cheapest variety of newsprint. Leafing through a copy leaves one's fingers smudged. In Manila, newsstands no longer all carry *komiks*, for the publications no longer sell as they once so phenomenally did.

A Filipino comic book revival of sorts, however, has been brewing at present, stirred in large part by comics art enthusiasts and a new generation of artists who

¹¹⁵ Florendo, pp. 86-7.

¹¹⁶ 1994 *Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey FLEMMS, Volume II Mass Media* (Manila: Department of Education, Culture and Sports and National Statistics Office, 1996), pp. xxii-xxiii.

¹¹⁷ 1999 *UNESCO Statistical Yearbook* (Paris and London: UNESCO Publishing and Bernan Press, 1999), p. IV-227.

evidently bear a sense of nostalgia for the golden years of the Filipino comic book and the influence of the Japanese forms of *anime* and *manga*. New titles have been appearing sporadically, some of them new versions of ‘classics’ such as Ravelo’s ‘Darna’ and ‘Lastikman’ series. Printed on thick glossy paper and in vibrant colour, the publications look more like American comic books or graphic novels rather than the local *komiks* of old. They are also generally written in English and not inexpensively priced, over one hundred pesos (P100) per copy. Thus they appeal more to a cult following rather than the mass audiences. They are usually available only in the comic book shops and the magazine stands, outlets that sell mainly imported titles, in the shopping malls of Metro Manila.

Roces died in the early 1990s; he was over 92 years old. Some of his businesses were carried on by his family; the others sold to the highest bidders. Atlas Publishing, the flagship of Roces’s chain of *komiks* publishing firms, was acquired by Alfred Ramos in 1996. The company remains involved in producing comic books, magazines, and textbooks. Interestingly, Atlas Publishing is now a link in another chain of companies owned by another family. The Ramoses have businesses in printing, publishing, book distribution, and bookselling, among others. It is National Book Store, founded by Alfred’s parents Jose and Socorro in the 1930s, that is the crown of their empire. With over seventy branches spread throughout the country, National Book Store is the leading bookseller-stationer in the Philippines. It practically controls the book retail industry. It is virtually another monopoly.

CHAPTER SIX

LOVE IN THE TIME OF TURMOIL

Filipino romance novels of the late twentieth century

There appears to be nothing particularly remarkable about *Midnight Phantom* by Martha Cecilia, a Filipino novel published as a cheap little paperback in 1997. It is a steamy love story written in Taglish, a combination of colloquial Tagalog and English. Set mainly in Manila in 1996, the narrative involves a mysterious, disfigured radio disc jockey named Brandon Brazil, his avid fan Nadja, and her young stepmother Anya who become, as the blurb puts it, 'caught in a web of love, deceit and vengeance'. According to the author, the work was inspired by *The Phantom of the Opera*, more likely Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical play rather than Gaston Leroux's novel in French.¹ Martha Cecilia's *Midnight Phantom* was published by the Precious Pages Corporation under its Precious Hearts Classics series. The novel may have little to boast of in terms of its physical aspect as a book and its artistic merit as a literary text, but it might well make a proud claim out of its commercial success. What is extraordinary about *Midnight Phantom* is that, since its initial publication, it has gone through four more printings (in 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002). The book sold out in just two weeks, as its fifth edition proclaims on the cover (FIGURE 34). In this latest edition, Martha Cecilia is promoted as 'The Bestselling Author'. Hardly any Filipino novel of serious literary quality has seen multiple reprinting much less sold out within

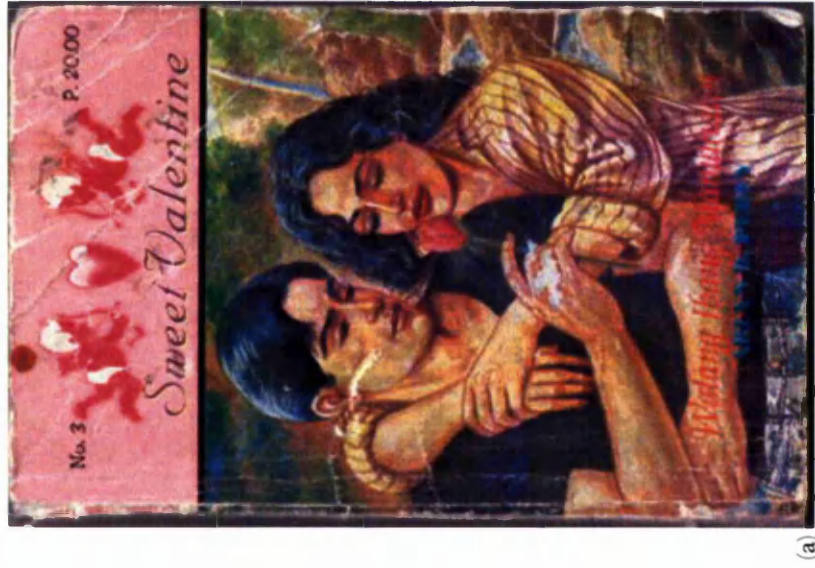
¹ 'Mula sa Author', in *Midnight Phantom*, 5th printing, (Quezon City: Precious Pages Corporation, 2002), inside back cover.



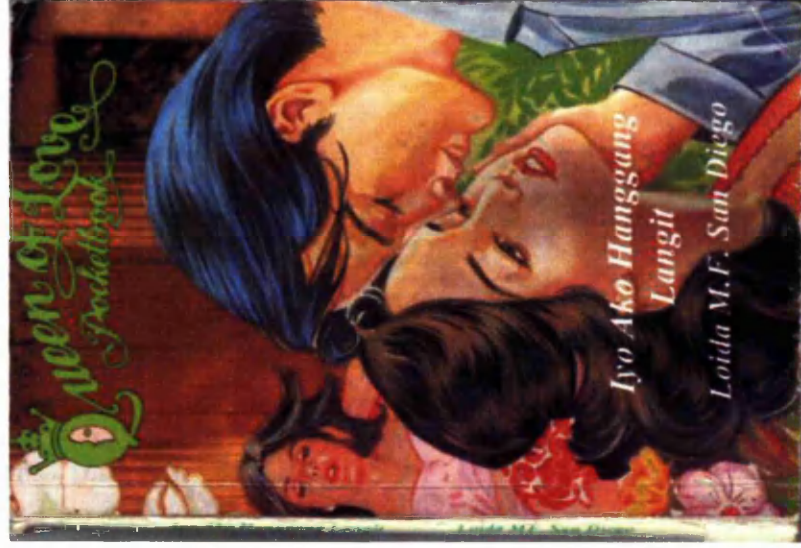
FIGURE 34. Cover of *Midnight Phantom* by Martha Cecilia, published by Precious Pages Corporation, 5th printing, 2002. (Image reduced.)

such short periods of time; very few Filipino authors of serious literature can actually be described as bestselling.

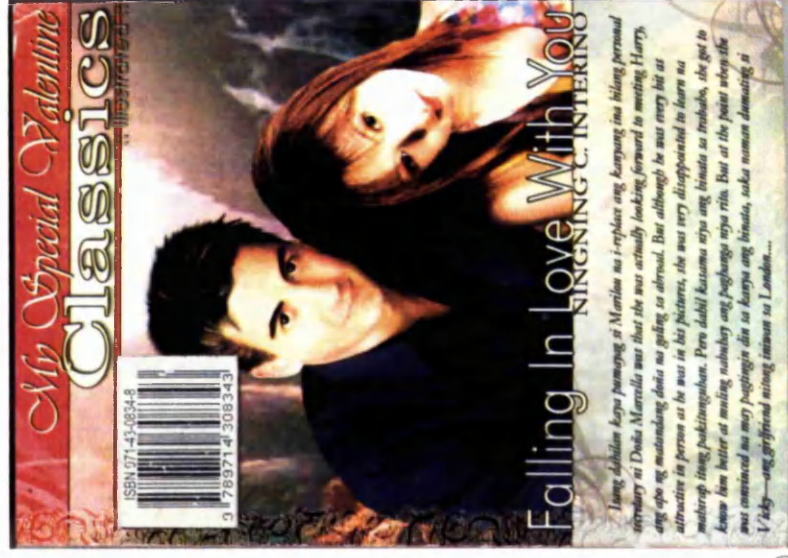
Martha Cecilia's *Midnight Phantom* is only one title among the spectacular number of Filipino romance novels that have been published since the mid-1980s. While various publishers have been involved in producing Filipino romance novels, their books invariably keep to a general formula. Each volume is published as part of a series. All are printed as paperbacks with glossy covers and newsprint leaves, and sized in 'pocketbook' format, typically measuring 17 x 10.5 cm and consisting of 128 pages (FIGURE 35). This appearance has come to be a distinguishing feature of the books, which have been referred to also as 'Tagalog pocketbooks' or 'romance paperbacks'. Their stories all revolve around the theme of love, more specifically the ideal that 'love conquers all'. Their characters are stereotypical (the rich boy, the poor girl, the disapproving parent, the meddling rival) and entangled in emotionally charged circumstances (forbidden love, unrequited love, love triangle, love lost and regained). Their plot lines are usually marked by rapid turns of events, strung with incredible coincidences, and spiced up with at least two sex scenes; they always ultimately lead to happy endings. All the romance novels are written in colloquial Tagalog or Taglish. They are sold at a price ranging from twenty to forty pesos (P20-40) per copy, cheaper than a fast food meal from any of the popular chains all over the country. In a sense, the books are local versions of foreign romance novels of the Mills & Boon or Harlequin Romances variety. Yet, as unabashedly melodramatic and steadfastly formulaic in nature, the Filipino romance novels display the influence of older forms of popular literary writing—the Philippine metrical romance (*awit* and *corrido*), the Tagalog novel, and the Filipino comic book (*komiks*)—which bear the same qualities. The Filipino romance novel may trace its origin in



(a)



(b)



(c)

FIGURE 35. A sampling of front covers of Filipino romance novels: (a) *Walang Ibang Mamahalin* (No Other Love) by Arlyn D. Perey, published by Atlas Publishing in 1997; (b) *Iyo Ako Hanggang Langit* (I Am Yours Till Heaven) by Loida M.F. San Diego, Nem's Publication, 2000; (c) *Falling In Love With You* by Ningning C. Interino, Bookware Publishing, c.2003.

(Images reduced.)

some measure to these other genres, but its place in Philippine literary publishing history is all its own. In the late twentieth century, the romance novels were the literary bestsellers of the nation.²

The immense popularity of Filipino romance novels, a recent and as of yet ongoing phenomenon, has stirred some interest among critics, scholars, and writers. A few articles on the subject have appeared in various newspapers and magazines.³ Some academic studies have been undertaken, too, which consider the romance novels as literary texts either from a feminist perspective or in the context of the tradition of the Tagalog novel or of Philippine popular literature.⁴ The accounts and enquiries are not many nor are they all comprehensive, but they serve as grounds for further exploration. Worth more thorough examining in particular is the matter of the publishing of the romance novels, for their popularity as commercial products is indeed remarkable. How they were produced, distributed, promoted, and received not only reveals much about the books themselves and their authors, publishers, and

² The case of Filipino romance novels falls in line with the popularity and success of the romance novel genre in general, which seems nothing short of a worldwide phenomenon. Mills & Boon, for instance, sold over 200 million paperback novels (translated into twenty-four languages) in one hundred overseas markets in 1998. In the United Kingdom alone, Mills & Boon claims eleven million loyal readers, representing four out of every ten women. It is estimated that a Mills & Boon novel is sold every two seconds. The firm has cornered 54 per cent of the UK paperback romance fiction market, a sub-market which comprises 32 per cent of all mass market paperback sales. Mills & Boon operates under the Canadian publishing empire Harlequin Enterprises, which acquired the UK firm in 1972. Joseph McAleer, *Passion's Fortune: The Story of Mills & Boon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 2-3, 8.

³ See Isagani Cruz, 'For Love and Money', *Asiaweek*, 13 September 1987, p. 67; Susan A. de Guzman, 'Queen of Hearts', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 21 February 1993, p. 18; Ericson Acosta, 'Spreading Your Legs on a Bed of Roses', *Philippine Collegian*, 8 July 1993, p. 7; and C. Mendez Legaspi, 'Romance and Finance', *Today*, 11 September 2000.

⁴ See Rosario Cruz Lucero, 'Romancing the Otherness of Woman', in *Reading Popular Culture*, ed. by Soledad Reyes (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1991); Remedios Zoleta-Miciano, 'Contemporary Tagalog Novels (1975-1985): Semiotic Perspectives' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of the Philippines, 1992); Georgina Reyes Encanto, 'The Development of the Filipino Romance Novel as Written by Women (1922-1992)' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of the Philippines, 1996); Joi Barrios, 'Pagsusuri sa Pagkabighani sa mga Nobela ng Pag-Ibig (Isang Pag-aaral na Ginawa sa Punto de Bista ng Isang Masugid na Mambabasa ng mga "Contemporary Romance Novels" sa Pilipinas)', in *Ang Aking Prince Charming at Iba Pang Noveleta ng Pag-Ibig* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2000), pp. 277-89; and Soledad Reyes, *The Romance Mode in Philippine Popular Literature* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1991).

readers but also offers a perspective on Philippine literary publishing in general during the period of 1985 to 2000. The experience of Books for Pleasure and Precious Pages Corporation is especially illuminating, for the two firms stand out as the most successful publishers of Filipino romance novels at the time.

Filipino romance novels emerged during a restive period in modern Philippine history, when the nation was plagued by political instability, social unrest, and economic hardship. Martial Law, which had been in effect since 1972, was finally lifted in 1981 by President Ferdinand E. Marcos. The repeal meant little for a nation that had already become despondent and destitute. Under the rule of Marcos, who had been in office since 1965, the Philippines saw the value of its currency dwindle and its foreign debt swell rapidly and enormously. In 1965, the exchange rate of the local currency against the US dollar (\$1.00) stood at three pesos and ninety centavos (P3.90); by 1981, it had diminished to seven pesos and ninety centavos (P7.90). The foreign debt was at around six hundred million dollars (\$600,000,000) in 1965; it had risen to twenty-one billion dollars (\$21,000,000,000) by 1981.⁵ The lifting of Martial Law bore no promise of reviving the ailing economy or restoring the rights of civil society or providing a better life in general for the Filipinos. Marcos maintained his fierce grip on power, suppressing all opposition to his administration, keeping media under control, and coddling the abusive police and military forces. His government remained excessively and notoriously corrupt. In 1983, the former senator Benigno Aquino Jr set out to return to the Philippines from exile in the United States. Aquino was Marcos's closest rival; on him was pinned the hope of many for political change and national reformation. On 21 August, upon arriving at the Manila International

⁵ Kim Scipes, 'Global Economic Crisis, Neoliberal Solutions, and the Philippines', *Monthly Review* 51 (December 1999), repr. in *Monthly Review* <<http://www.monthlyreview.org/1299scip.htm>> [accessed 5 February 2006].

Airport, Aquino was murdered on the tarmac. The assassination shocked the nation and then steered it into action. The period that followed was marked by various protest activities that involved practically all sectors of Philippine society. The rallies in the streets of Makati (the financial district of the country), the walkouts from offices and universities, the boycotts of businesses associated with Marcos, the evening noise barrages, and other forms of resistance increased in frequency and intensity. The once fearful grumbling against Marcos and his government had grown to a bold clamour for his outright ouster. In a defiant bid to secure the legitimacy and restore the credibility of his leadership, Marcos called for a snap election to be held on 7 February 1986.

Amid the political turmoil rocking the nation, the Filipino romance novel series was conceived. In 1985, the firm Books for Pleasure set out to produce the Valentine Romances line. The pioneering venture had little to do directly with politics but nearly everything with economics. After the Aquino assassination, as the state of the nation progressively became unstable, the economy went into a tailspin. The Philippine peso weakened further against the US dollar; the foreign debt increased even more. (By early 1986, the peso-dollar exchange rate would be at P20.58 to \$1.00, the foreign debt at \$27,200,000,000.⁶) The steady inflation forced many local businesses to cut back drastically if not shut down completely. Others had to find alternative sources of income in order to survive. Some publishers, for instance, resorted to the printing of office stationery, maps, recipe books, and calendars.⁷ Books for Pleasure was actually a new publisher, but it had been involved in the book trade since 1976 as the local representative of a number of British and American publishers,

⁶ Scipes.

⁷ Georgina Reyes Encanto, 'The Development of the Filipino Romance Novel as Written by Women (1922-1992)' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of the Philippines, 1996), p. 156.

notable among them Mills & Boon and Bantam Books (its Loveswept Romances series in particular).⁸ The company, founded by Benjamin Ocampo with some colleagues from the book distribution sector, not only had to bear the grim economic conditions of the time but also had to contend with the new restrictions on importation imposed by the Marcos government.⁹ Consequently, Books for Pleasure made the crucial shift from distributing imported books to publishing original Filipino romance novels. The move, according to Ocampo, was driven by the need to survive.¹⁰ While it appears to have been a rational course of action, considering the company's experience in book distribution and its special knowledge of the market for romance novels, it was a gamble nonetheless. Publishing literary books in the Philippines, whether in the best or worst of economic climates, has generally involved high risks and offered low profits. But, for Books for Pleasure, there was a fortuitous encounter or what seems a stroke of luck that further pushed it to make its bet. The company came across a group of restless authors who were looking for other outlets for their writing.¹¹ It was a pool of talent that could yield gold. The authors had years of experience writing for the popular comic books; they specialised in romantic stories; and they were well known to millions of readers throughout the country. They provided Books for Pleasure with material for its Valentine Romances line. The series was meant to be launched in 1985, but its first set of titles did not see print until the year after.¹² Great events had obstructed its path.

⁸ Benjamin Ocampo, e-mail message to author, 17 February 2006.

⁹ Ocampo, e-mail message, 17 February 2006.

¹⁰ E-mail message, 17 February 2006.

¹¹ Ericson Acosta, 'Spreading Your Legs on a Bed of Roses', *Philippine Collegian*, 8 July 1993, p. 7; and Karina A. Bolasco, 'Publishing and Writers', paper delivered at Authors'/Writers' Forum, University of the East Foundation for Research and Advanced Studies, Manila, 27 June 2000, p. 7.

¹² Benjamin Ocampo, e-mail message to author, 20 February 2006.

The national elections of 1986, perhaps the most fraudulent and violent in Philippine history, resulted in a deadlock: Marcos obstinately clung to power and declared himself the duly elected president while the opposition rejected the 'official' results of the election and proclaimed its candidate Corazon C. Aquino, widow of Benigno Aquino Jr, the rightful leader of the nation. The deadlock was shattered by a revolution. On 22 February, the Minister of National Defense Juan Ponce Enrile and Vice Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Fidel V. Ramos withdrew their support for Marcos and, with their allies, held fort at the military facilities Camp Aguinaldo and Camp Crame on Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA), the highway running through Metro Manila. Marcos ordered his army to arrest them. Cardinal Jaime Sin, Archbishop of Manila, called on his flock through the church-owned Radio Veritas to go to EDSA to support Enrile and Ramos, to stand guard, and to pray. Filipinos, whether Catholic or not, heeded the appeal of the Cardinal. Within a few days, EDSA was packed with over a million of people. Their cry was one and resounding: that Marcos resign immediately. Marcos's tanks and trucks of soldiers turned back without firing at the crowds. On 25 February, Marcos fled the country. Corazon C. Aquino became the new President of the Philippines.¹³

The nation was in a state of euphoria after the 'EDSA Revolution' of February 1986 (also called the 'People Power Revolution'). Expectations of change, development, and progress were high, perhaps unrealistically so. In truth, the nation was beset by tremendous long-standing problems—not all created by the Marcos dictatorship to be sure but certainly exacerbated by it—to which there were no immediate or easy solutions. The condition of the economy was critical; social divisions were wide and deep, the moral fibre of society was weak; a culture of graft

¹³ For detailed accounts on the 'EDSA Revolution', see *Bayan Ko!* (Hong Kong: Project 28 Days, 1986); *People Power: The Philippine Revolution of 1986*, ed. by Monina Allarey Mercado (Manila: James B. Reuter, S.J., Foundation, 1986); and *A Million Heroes* (Manila: Omega News Service, 1986).

and corruption was embedded in government. The political situation itself remained unstable. The Aquino administration was beleaguered by several coup d'état attempts staged by either right-wing or Marcos-loyalist forces, the persistent insurgent activities of the communist National People's Army throughout the countryside and the separatist Muslim National Liberation Front in the south (Mindanao), and the growing opposition to the presence of the American military bases in the country. As if the troubles of the nation were not enough, nature unleashed several destructive typhoons, a devastating earthquake, and a catastrophic volcanic eruption on the Philippines during the term of President Aquino (1986-1992). Despite all adversity, the sense of freedom and hope revived by the EDSA Revolution remained strong in Filipinos. But perhaps what saw the people through one crisis after another was their natural resilience. After the dust of the revolution had settled, they carried on with their lives as normal. It was business as usual in spite of bad politics and bad weather.

Books for Pleasure opened for business. It launched its Valentine Romances series in mid-1986 with four titles: *Bawal Kūtang Ibigin* (I Am Forbidden To Love You) by Helen Meriz, *Kahit Mahal Kita* (Even If I Love You) by Maria Elena Cruz, *Pag-ibig Ko, Karapatan Ko* (My Love, My Right) by Lualhati Bautista, and *Laro ng Mga Puso* (Game of Hearts) by Marissa Pascual.¹⁴ Each book had a print run of 3000 copies.¹⁵ The next releases came erratically—some in batches of two titles, others in four after a few months. As Ocampo explains, not only was Books for Pleasure still in the process of establishing itself in the publishing business but also 'approved manuscripts came far too few'.¹⁶

¹⁴ The imprint date of these first four titles is 1985. Some succeeding titles bear the same date even if they were actually released also in 1986.

¹⁵ Ocampo, e-mail message, 20 February 2006.

¹⁶ E-mail message, 20 February 2006.

The response to Valentine Romances surprised even the publishers themselves: the early books of the series 'sold out very quickly'. Due to the market demand, says Ocampo, 'we had to reprint a few more times while preparing for the release of new titles'.¹⁷ The print runs of the Valentines Romances books grew steadily to 5000, 6000, 8000, and then 10,000 copies per title.¹⁸ The series began to be distributed nationwide in 1988, when Books for Pleasure engaged the services of the book distribution company Megastrat.¹⁹ In 1991, Valentine Romances sold 148,390 copies and achieved an income of P3,500,000, representing 19.9 per cent of the total sales of trade books in the Philippines.²⁰

Other publishers were not blind to the good fortune of Books for Pleasure or to the prospects in the area it had ventured into. What ensued was a gold rush. By 1992, there were thirty-five Filipino romance novel series in circulation, produced by twenty-three publishers.²¹ The profiles of the publishers varied. There were giant companies involved in comic book, magazine, and textbook publishing (Atlas Publishing and Rex Publishing), a reputable publisher of local trade books (Anvil Publishing), a religious publisher (Salesiana Publishing of the Don Bosco order), a printer (SGE Printers), and even an author of romance novels herself (Gilda Olvidado). Other enterprises were new to the publishing industry altogether. Books for Pleasure remained in the lead, publishing ten new titles a month at 10,000 copies

¹⁷ E-mail message, 20 February 2006.

¹⁸ Ocampo, e-mail message, 20 February 2006.

¹⁹ Bolasco, 'Publishing and Writers', p. 7. Megastrat, a distributor of imported and local books, was acquired by Anvil Publishing in 1990. Both Megastrat and Anvil are subsidiaries of National Book Store, the leading bookseller-stationer in the Philippines.

²⁰ Figures provided by Gwen Galvez, Marketing Manager of Anvil, in *Encanto*, pp. 155, 181.

²¹ See *Encanto*, pp. 241-2.

per title.²² In 1992, the firm achieved sales of 1,500,000 copies.²³ The remarkable output of Books of Pleasure, however, would pale in comparison to what would be achieved eventually by the Precious Pages Corporation, one of the new companies that had entered the publishing industry with the sole intention of producing romance novels.

The beginnings of the Precious Pages Corporation were inauspicious, or ‘heartbreaking’ as described by a journalist.²⁴ Set up in 1992 by Segundo Matias Jr and Richard Reynante, who were freelance writers for television, the company had a meagre capital of P35,000 (around £600 at the time) and operated from a dilapidated building in Quezon City. It launched its Precious Hearts Romances series with a single title, *Lumaban Ka, Pag-Ibig* (You Fight, Love) by Patricia Gil, which involved difficulties in printing and even had Matias and Reynante doing the binding themselves. The partners remained undaunted in their pursuit to publish, as their company tagline declares, ‘The Best Love Stories Of All Time....’ Their persistence paid off. By 1997, Precious Pages had produced around 400 titles under its Precious Hearts Romances line (FIGURE 36). It had also launched six other series: Kristine; St Bernadette; Forever Love; Cadena de Amor (Chain of Love); My Love, My Hero; and Precious Hearts Classics. The company continued to grow in the face of stiff competition.

While many publishers dropped out of the romance novel business, other new players continued to enter the trade. Even one of the most prestigious universities in

²² Ocampo, e-mail message, 20 February 2006.

²³ Acosta, p. 7.

²⁴ C. Mendez Legaspi, ‘Romance and Finance’, *Today*, 11 September 2000, repr. in ‘Better Business’, *EYP* <<http://v1.eyp.ph/betterbiz/091100/romance.html>> [accessed 15 July 2005]. The requests made by the author for an interview with either of the Precious Pages founders were completely ignored. Thus this study has had to rely on Legaspi’s article for details on the firm’s origins and operations. Information presented here on Precious Pages, covering the period 1992 to 2000, is derived mainly from the account of Legaspi.

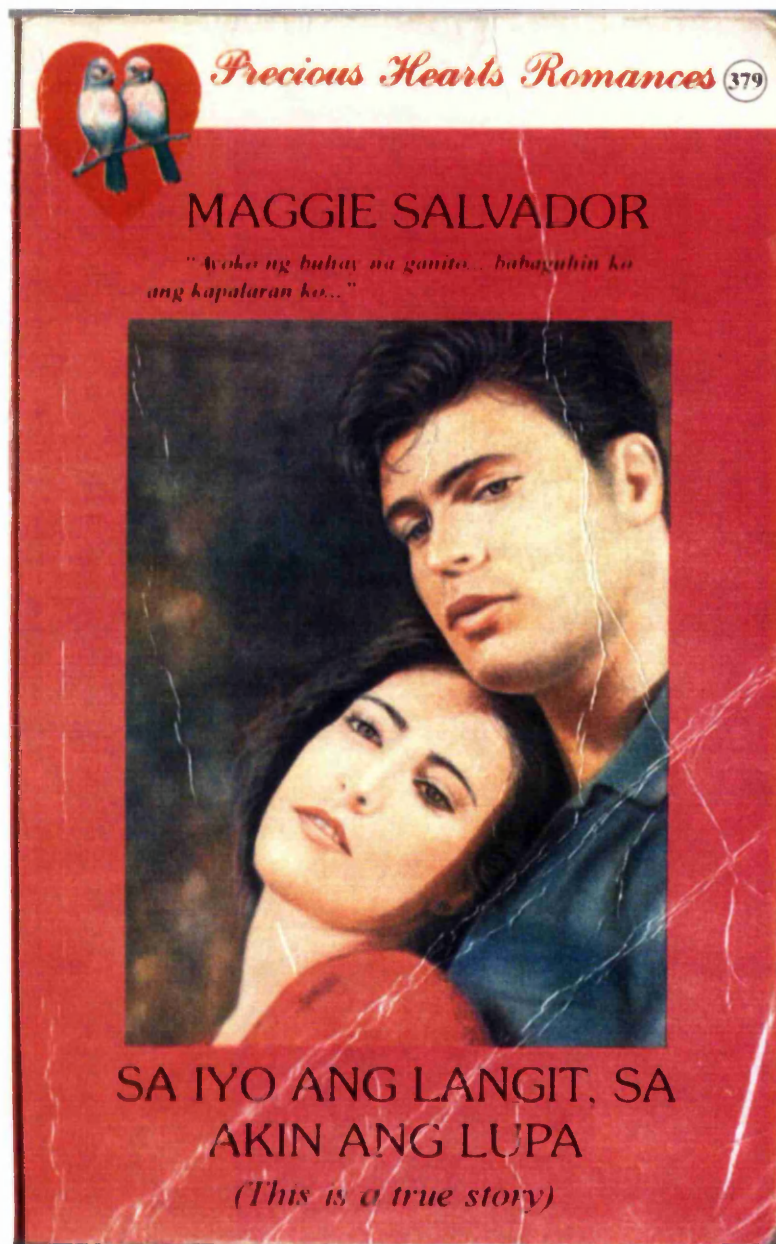


FIGURE 36. Front cover of *Sa Iyo Ang Langit, Sa Akin Ang Lupa* (Heaven is Yours, Earth is Mine) by Maggie Salvador, published by Precious Pages in 1997 as the 379th title under its Precious Hearts Romances series.

(Image in actual size.)

the Philippines tried its hand at producing Tagalog paperback romances. In 1998, the De La Salle University Press launched the Green Cupid Romances series (green being the official colour of the university), which generated only two thin volumes both written by Lakangiting C. Garcia and then promptly disappeared from the market. By 2000, the Filipino romance novel trade appears to have levelled off in terms of the number of publishers involved. It is likely that the Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s forced the smaller outfits out of the business. But by no means did the publishing plateau as far as output and income were concerned. According to a contemporary account, there were ten to fifteen active publishers, each producing at least four titles a month with print runs in the range of 5000 to 20,000 copies per title.²⁵ A publishing industry executive estimates that an average release of twenty titles a month selling 20,000 copies each could generate a monthly gross income of P14,000,000.²⁶ In 2000, Precious Pages was publishing more than thirty new titles a month with print runs at 8000 to 10,000 copies per title. The company was worth more than P50,000,000. In the standard advertisements on the inside covers of its books, it described itself as 'The Biggest Publishing House of Tagalog Romance Novels'. It was a claim that no other publisher, in truth, could make for itself.

The post-EDSA Revolution period appears as an unlikely time for local romance novels to flourish in the Philippines. It might seem that Filipinos were consumed by the realities taking place and changing the face of their nation, that they were distracted from reading fiction of any kind. Current events would have provided all

²⁵ Joi Barrios, 'Pagsusuri sa Pagkabighani sa mga Nobela ng Pag-Ibig (Isang Pag-aaral na Ginawa sa Punto de Bista ng Isang Masugid na Mambabasa ng mga "Contemporary Romance Novels" sa Pilipinas)', in *Ang Aking Prince Charming at Iba Pang Noveleta ng Pag-Ibig* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2000), pp. 277-89 (pp. 277-8).

²⁶ Karina A. Bolasco, 'Emerging Trends in Philippine Publishing', paper delivered at Booklatan sa Bayan: Roundtable Discussions on Current and Emerging Trends in Book Publishing, Roxas City, 6 November 2002.

the action, drama, horror, and comedy that they wanted or needed at the time.

There was in fact an outburst of activity in the press with new periodicals launched, some revived, and others modified to meet the voracious public demand for news.

There, too, was an upsurge in trade book publishing, which produced a wide variety of new titles (mostly non-fiction) to satisfy readers who were hungry for information, enlightenment, and amusement. But there existed a desire among certain readers for something else, something that the news or the various books did not and could not offer. It was the Tagalog romance novel, and not any kind of fiction, that provided these readers with what they were looking for: cheap, romantic, formulaic entertainment that allowed them to escape even if only briefly from the very realities that were bearing upon the nation as well as their daily lives. As the experience of Anvil Publishing with its Rosas (Roses) romance series illustrates most clearly, the readers were exact and inflexible in what they wanted from the romance novels. The Rosas romance series was an experiment that failed.

Anvil Publishing, founded early in 1990 as a subsidiary of the country's leading bookseller-stationer National Book Store, specialises in trade books on Philippine history, sociology, and culture written by Filipino authors. The firm also publishes literature in English and Filipino under their Contemporary Philippine Poetry Series and Contemporary Philippine Fiction Series. Anvil quickly made a name for itself by producing moderately priced and smartly designed books that generally offered light but intellectually stimulating reading. The Anvil books typically appeared in paperback binding with book paper pages (more popular titles were issued in both book paper and newsprint editions), measured 22 x 14 cm (the standard size of local trade books), and priced at an average of around two hundred pesos (P200) per copy. Its market was mainly from the upper and high-middle classes of Philippine society.

In 1991, Anvil set its sights on a different and much larger market for a new project. Deciding to ride on the popularity of the Filipino romance novels, the firm launched the Rosas books. According to Karina A. Bolasco, Publishing Manager of Anvil, the series was 'packaged, priced, promoted, and distributed in exactly the same way as the Valentine [Romances] line was. It however did not peddle the same formula romance'. Anvil tapped writers of serious literature to produce material for its series. Some of the writers were academics or winners of prestigious literary awards or both. They created romance novels that were better crafted than the titles of other publishers and that were subtly infused with a social relevance, touching on issues such as rape, incest, discrimination and violence against women, mail-order brides, prostitution, poverty, and environmental degradation. The Rosas series, says Bolasco, aimed to reach the romance novel audience, offer them something new, and raise their appreciation standards by exposing them to finer uses of language and imagination. It was an objective founded on an expectation: that the audience 'would soon be turned off by the predictability of the formula romance'. Anvil had misread the romance novel market. The feedback on the Rosas series stated: 'Stories were too depressing; Tondo [a slum area in Manila] was repulsive for a setting; nothing was happening in the stories; no happy ending'. The series sold at a rate of only 2500 copies in six months. After two years, dealers stopped ordering the books because copies stayed too long on their shelves. Anvil eventually discontinued the Rosas series. It produced a total of thirty titles.²⁷

²⁷ The account of the Rosas series in this paragraph is derived largely from Bolasco, 'Publishing and Writers', pp. 7-8. An effort similar to the Rosas series would be undertaken by the Women's Education, Development, Productivity and Research Organization, Inc (WEDPRO), a non-governmental organisation working for women's rights and the rehabilitation of prostitutes and sex traffic victims. In 2001, with a grant from the Ford Foundation, WEDPRO produced the Hawlang Apoy (Contained Fire) romance novel series, which tackled themes such as drug abuse, prostitution, and the trafficking of women. At least three titles appeared under the series.

While the Rosas series seemingly had all the elements for success, not in the least of which was a ready access to the vast retail network of National Book Store, it failed because ultimately it did not offer readers all that they desired. The experience of Anvil reveals what is perhaps the most important aspect of the Filipino romance novel publishing business: it was intensely market-driven. The publishers who succeeded did so by dutifully and faithfully meeting the very specific demands of their readers. As the cases of Books for Pleasure and Precious Pages display, the romance novels not only had to be accessible in terms of pricing and packaging but also familiar and reliable or indeed predictable as far as content was concerned. These exact and inflexible demands were determined by the character of the market.

The Filipino romance novel market was made up of female readers predominantly from the low-middle and high-lower classes. According to the informal surveys conducted by Books for Pleasure and by Anvil, the readers were students, housewives, office clerks and secretaries, salesgirls, nannies, masseuses, and laundrywomen.²⁸ Among the housewives, many were married to overseas contract workers (mainly in the Middle East); they were economically stable and thus had more disposable income and more leisure time.²⁹ Female overseas workers themselves (nurses, nannies, domestic helpers, entertainers, etc) comprised an important sector of the romance novel readership. Many of the romance novel readers came from the comic book audience.³⁰ Like the writers of the early Valentine Romances titles, they had tired of or outgrown the form. Other readers were not interested in it to begin with; most likely they were too young or not born yet during the heyday of the *komiks* in the 1960s and 1970s. In the mid-1990s, in what appears as a bid to recapture their female

²⁸ Encanto, pp. 157, 180.

²⁹ Barrios, 'Pagsusuri sa Pagkabighani sa mga Nobela ng Pag-Ibig', p. 286.

³⁰ Bolasco, 'Publishing and Writers', p. 8.

readership, which was the larger segment of their audience, comic book publishers began re-issuing their serialised stories as thin novelettes priced at ten to twenty pesos (P10-20) per copy.³¹ The books did not meet with much success. Perhaps, like Anvil's Rosas series, they did not completely please the market.

The romance novel readers were evidently better off, more discriminating, and more sophisticated than that of the comic books. Firstly, the romance novels were significantly more expensive than the *komiks*. In 1986, for example, comic books were priced typically at two pesos and twenty-five centavos (P2.25) per copy.³² At that time, the Valentine Romances titles were selling at thirty pesos (P30) each, which was not an insignificant amount considering that the minimum daily wage was at around thirty-seven pesos (P37).³³ Still, as the early experience of Books for Pleasure displays, readers were not only able but also most willing to purchase romance novels. By 1995, the minimum daily wage had risen to the range of ninety-nine to one hundred and forty-five pesos (P99-145).³⁴ The price of romance novels remained at around thirty pesos (P30) per copy, which made the books affordable to even more readers. Secondly, the romance novels came in a form that was more portable, durable, and presentable than the comic books (which appeared in a standard size of 24 x 17 cm, with an average of 46 pages in newsprint, inclusive of the covers, and bound by staples in single gatherings). In its paperback format, the romance novels were conveniently

³¹ Bolasco, 'Emerging Trends'.

³² Clodualdo del Mundo Jr, 'Komiks: An Industry, A Potent Medium, Our National "Book", and Pabulum of Art Appreciation', in *Philippine Mass Media: A Book of Readings*, ed. by Clodualdo del Mundo and Jose Mari Magpayo (Metro Manila: Communication Foundation for Asia, 1986), pp. 170- 85 (p. 179).

³³ 'Summary of Wage Legislations Granting Increases in the Basic Minimum Wage (1951-1989)', *National Wages and Productivity Commission, Department of Labor and Employment Official Website*, <http://www.nwpc.dole.gov.ph/pages/statistics/stat_wage%20rates1951-89.html> [accessed 6 April 2005].

³⁴ 'Summary of Daily Minimum Wage Rates Per Wage Order, By Region Non-Agriculture (1989-2005)', *National Wages and Productivity Commission, Department of Labor and Employment Website*, <http://www.nwpc.dole.gov.ph/pages/statistics/stat_wage%20rates1989-03.html> [accessed 27 February 2006].

sized and sturdy enough to be carried around, slipped into handbags, or stuffed into pockets. The books, too, could endure several readings, whether by the book owners themselves or by other readers with whom they may share or exchange volumes, and could remain fairly intact after for keeping as part of a collection. Finally, compared with the *komiks*, the romance novels seemed more proper as books and not only in terms of physical quality. The comic books, being immensely popular with the masses, bore the stigma of being crude or low class. As critics put it, the publications served only as a means to while away the time ('pampalipas oras') and could be read even by the semi-literate. The Filipino romance novels hardly count as highbrow reading, but they were of a higher grade than the comic books. As works in full text, the romance novels demanded more time, thought, and engagement from their readers. It is evident from the level of language and treatment of the subject matter in the texts that the romance novels, too, required their readers to have at least some high school education and a certain worldliness for them to understand and appreciate the material.

The Filipino romance novels may have had some measure of respectability about them in contrast to the comic books, but they were not spared from scorn all the same. As Bolasco notes, some people saw the books as 'just a waste of precious trees'.³⁵ Ocampo recalls that he received 'flak and ridicule' from various sectors, including peers in the publishing industry, who regarded Books for Pleasure as 'a "bakya" [low class] or "baduy" [naïf] publisher of Tagalog trash'.³⁶ The derision for Filipino romance novels has to do with two related factors: on the one hand, the vast gap in economics and sensibilities between the social classes in the Philippines and, on the other, the 'colonial mentality' that is still so pervasive in Filipino society, the

³⁵ Bolasco, 'Emerging Trends'.

³⁶ E-mail message, 20 February 2006.

mindset that deems everything and anything imported (or American specifically) as superior to whatever is local. It is telling that the imported romance novels circulating alongside the local titles generated little disapproval. The imported titles—such as those from the Harlequin Romances and Silhouette Romances series (of Harlequin) for adults and the Sweet Dreams Romances (Bantam Books) and Sweet Valley High (Random House) series for teen-agers, or the bestsellers of Danielle Steele, Judith Krantz, and Susan Isaacs—sold at a price range of around one hundred to three hundred pesos (P100-300) per copy in paperback. They were popular with readers from the upper and high-middle classes, those who were generally wealthier, better educated, and more attuned to Western culture than the readers of the Filipino romance novels. The imported titles were no more edifying than the local books. Both were cut from the same basic boy-meets-girl love-story pattern and kept to a predictable formula. However, the imported titles were precisely that: they were imported. They were in English, and they featured foreign settings and characters. Thus, for some Filipinos, they made for classier reading than the local romance novels. But the fact remains that the local titles suited the circumstances and desires of more Filipinos. The books were not only respectable enough, as far as readers from the other classes were concerned, but also more effective and entertaining because they were more accessible.

While there is no mistaking that the Filipino romance novels were modelled after the imported books, most notably in packaging and design, the stories of the local titles were not altogether shaped according to the foreign mould. The Filipino romance novels drew from the conventions and the traditions of older forms of popular Philippine literature. For instance, stereotypical characters and happy endings were standard features of the metrical romances of the Spanish colonial

period and the early twentieth century. The motif of love tried and tested, where lovers have to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles in order to be blissfully united in the end, was common too in the *awits* and *corridos*. Then, melodrama and sentimentality were distinctive characteristics of the Tagalog novels from the 1900s to the 1950s. Romantic love itself was the most dominant theme of the works of the period. It was usually the central subject matter of the novels; if not, it was still an indispensable element in the stories. As the novelist Fausto J. Galauran observes, it was the immortal topic of love that readers found most entertaining.³⁷ Finally, for the comic books of the 1950s to the 1980s, romantic love was also a common and important subject matter. The *komiks* took the basic love story to a new level by producing it in all its possible permutations, heightening the fantasy element about it, and adding on an unabashed eroticism. The theme of the triumph of the underdog was also a notable favourite of the comic books. The Filipino romance novels absorbed and adapted all these elements—characters and plots, motifs and devices, themes and images—from the *awits* and *corridos*, the Tagalog novels, and the *komiks*. Moreover, the romance novels followed the basic narrative formula established by and in these older forms. In a study on Filipino romance novels, Georgina Reyes Encanto describes such as ‘a simplistic struggle between opposing forces (representing social and moral qualities or traits), with the underdog emerging as the victor, as signaled by the predictable ... happy ending’.³⁸ Incidentally, the stories of local radio plays, television series, and films also generally conformed to this formula. The Filipino romance novels blended this with the standard, universal storylines of romance

³⁷ ‘Mga Paksa ng Nobelang Tagalog’, in *Sampaksan ng mga Nobelistang Tagalog: Mga Panayam Tungkol sa Nobelang Tagalog na Binigkas Noong Abril 11, 1969* (Quezon City: Ang Aklatan, Unibersidad ng Pilipinas, 1974), pp. 32-7 (p. 33).

³⁸ p. 154.

narratives, which were made more specific to the Philippine setting to better suit local taste. Joi Barrios, in an article on how to write romance novels, describes the plot elements as follows:

- a. mayamang lalaki—mahirap na babae—pinakapalask; maari pang magkaroon ng kontrabidang ina na tutol sa pag-iibigan;
 - b. mahirap na lalaki—mayamang babae—baryasyon ng una pero mas exciting dahil mas nakakaangat sa lipunan ang bidang babae; gayon pa man, dapat ay handa siyang magpakumbaba para sa lalaki;
 - k. kontrabidang magulang—naka-ugat ito sa kwento nina Romeo at Juliet. Posibleng magkatunggali ang pamilya dahil sa politika;
 - d. babaeng mapang-agaw sa pag-ibig—dito mas malaki ang papel ng kontrabida. Maaaring wasakin niya ang buhay ng bidang babae—hagisan ng asido, itulak sa bangin, yurak-yurakin ang pagkatao...;
 - e. sakuna, lindol, aksidente, epidemya, pagsabok ng bulkan—dito nagkakahiwalay ang magsing-irog...;
 - g. paghihiwalay dulot ng pagiging OCW, kapus-palad o kaya'y simpleng katangahan—kontemporaryong baryason ito ng nauna;
 - h. pagbabalik, paghihiganti, at pagkakatuluyang muli— ... maaaring may naapi sa simula, nagbago ang kapalaran at nagbalik nang matagumpay sa bayang umapi sa kanya...;
 - i. mga baryason ng mga nabanggit na.³⁹
- (a. rich man—poor woman—most common; there may be, as antagonist, a mother who is opposed to their love;
 - b. poor man—rich woman—variation of the above but more exciting because the heroine is from a higher social class; nevertheless, she must be ready to humble herself for the man;
 - c. parents as antagonists—this is rooted in the story of Romeo and Juliet. The families may be rivals in politics;
 - d. a woman rival in love—the role here of the antagonist is larger. She may ruin the life of the heroine—throw acid at her, push her into a ravine, utterly demean her humanity...;
 - e. adversity, earthquake, accident, epidemic, volcanic eruption—which would cause the separation of the lovers...;
 - f. separation due to one's status as an overseas contract worker (OCW), poverty, or simple stupidity—a contemporary variation of the above;

³⁹ 'Chapter Eight (O Kung Paano Magsulat ng Romance Novel)', in *Ang Aking Prince Charming*, pp. 290-5 (p. 293).

- g. return, revenge, and reunion— ...there may be a victim at the start of the story whose fate changes and who returns triumphant to the town that persecuted her...;
- h. variations of the abovementioned.)

That the Filipino romance novels aligned themselves with older literary forms and adhered to standard love-story plot lines and elements made their stories familiar to the readers and thus easy to understand and appreciate.

To the basic narrative formula, the Filipino romance novels mixed in a sense of modernity and urbanity or a bourgeois flavour as it were. This distinguished it from the older literary forms, specifically the comic books and the traditional Tagalog novels to which it was more directly linked. The romance novels derived their distinct flavour from the use of familiar local places and sites as settings; the casual references made to current events, issues, and trends; and the attention paid to the appearance and status of the characters and details such as their residences, cars, clothing, and other material possessions. Always at least one protagonist was wealthy in the stories; it was usually the male character. This was an important feature in the Filipino romance novels, for it not only kept the narratives faithful to the love-story formula but also it allowed for a variety of rich settings and scenarios: in beautiful houses, holiday homes in the countryside, different parts of the world, or even inside a Mercedes Benz or a BMW.⁴⁰ This gave a tasteful quality to the romance novels. But perhaps it was the specific variety of language used in the stories that provided the Filipino romance novels most with its modern and urban flavour. Taglish was the popular everyday language in Metro Manila, the central and largest urban area in the Philippines. Taglish was not so much tied to class as English nor was it laden with tradition as Tagalog. English bore the impression of being too elitist while Tagalog,

⁴⁰ Barrios, 'Chapter Eight', p. 292.

too serious, formal, and old-fashioned. Taglish struck a nice balance between both languages. While it offended the sensibilities of Tagalog and English language purists, Taglish served as a convenient and efficient language for many Filipinos. It was also the emerging informal lingua franca of the nation since it was commonly used on television, in radio, and in films. Media not only propagated the use of Taglish but also to a certain degree made it fashionable. It is interesting to note that, in the 1990s, soap operas or 'telenovelas' filled up television primetime. They gained a massive, fanatical following all over the country. What is striking about the telenovelas is that the most popular series were not local rather they were Mexican productions dubbed in Taglish. The Tagalog romance novels bear many similarities with the telenovelas, basically offering the same kind of melodramatic and escapist entertainment in the colloquial language. Bolasco describes the books as 'soap on [sic] print'.⁴¹

Taglish served well the purposes of the Filipino romance novels. The language gave the stories a certain flexibility: straight English could be used in dialogue to indicate the wealth and status of characters, while a shift to straight Tagalog could be made in descriptions to heighten melodramatic scenes. The following passage from Helen Meriz's *Akin Ang Pag-ibig Mo* (Your Love is Mine), published by Books for Pleasure (1996), displays this handling of the languages (italics in the original):

"Hindi matutuloy ang kasal ninyo ni Rene. *I won't allow it.*"

Nanatili siyang maang na nakatitig kay Dante.

"You're not ruining my brother's life. Maaaring mula't sapul ay di kami magkasundo pero mahalaga pa rin sa akin ang kaligayahan niya. You cannot make him happy. Not now that we've met again at malaman mo kung sino ako."

Wala pa ring mamutawing kataga sa mga labi niya.

Lumapit sa kanya si Dante, hinawakan siya sa kamay at itinayo. "Kailan mo ipagtatapat sa kanya?"

⁴¹ 'Emerging Trends'.

“I-ipagtatapat ang alin?” nakuha niyang itanong.

“Ang tungkol sa atin, *damn it!*” Ikinainis ni Dante ang hindi niya pagkaintindi rito.

“At ano ang ipagtatapat ko?” galit ding sigaw niya na sa pagsigaw ni Dante ay tila natauhan. “Na minsan ay nakilala ko ang manloloko niyang kapatid at nang di nito makuha ang gusto sa akin ay bigla lang nawala?”⁴²

(‘Your marriage to Rene will not push through. I won’t allow it’.

She remained staring dumbfounded at Dante.

‘You’re not ruining my brother’s life. We may never have gotten along since birth, but his happiness is still important to me. You cannot make him happy. Not now that we’ve met again and you know who I am’.

Still, no words formed in her lips.

Dante came near her, held her hand and made her stand up. ‘When will you tell him?’

‘T-tell him what?’ she found it to ask.

‘About us, damn it!’ Dante was upset that she did not understand.

‘And what will I tell?’ she replied angrily too, as if she came to her senses when Dante raised his voice at her. ‘That I once knew his deceitful brother and when he didn’t get what he wanted from me he just suddenly disappeared?’)

However, more than the shifting between English and Tagalog, the interspersing of both languages was used in the romance novels, which captured (or attempted to at least) the quality of spoken Taglish. This gave the stories a sense of realism and contemporaneity. The sections in English were often awkward in construction or grammatically incorrect, but they nevertheless provided the romance novels with a veneer of sophistication or a bourgeois gloss, as demonstrated below by a passage from Maggie Salvador’s *Sa Iyo Ang Langit, Sa Akin Ang Lupa* (Heaven is Yours, Earth is Mine), published by Precious Pages (1997). This scene involves the heroines Alma, an

⁴² In *Helen Meriz Two-in-One Collection Book One* (repr. 2000), pp. 5-121 (p. 84).

unhappy woman who is having an affair with a married man, and Corazon, Alma's housemaid who had just recently arrived in Manila from the province.

"I want to run away from everything... I want to live... and love the little things that God gave to me... *naaintindihan mo ba ako, Corazon?*"

"I'm sorry sa pagsusuot ko nitong gown mo, Ma'am... Hindi na po mauulit. Sabik na sabik lang kasi akong makatikim kahit isang beses lang kung ano ang itsura ko kung... sosyal ako..."

Pero sa sarili nakatuon ang isip ni Alma.

"I want to be somebody who is not me. Gusto ko munang kalimutan na ako si Alma Velez... kahit konting panahon lang. I want to play a role... parang sa stage... parang artista na gaganap ng isang particular role."

[...]

"Okay lang sa akin ang pag-iilusyon mo, Corazon. Actually, puwede kang maging ako huwag mo lang gagayahin ang aking mga bisyo. At ako naman ay magpapanggap na ikaw... for a change..."

Nandilat ang mga mata ni Corazon [...]

"Switch...? Parang ganu'n?"

"Well... parang switch, parang hindi naman. Role playing lang, tulad ng pagpapanggap mong ako sa telepono, sa pag-entertain mo kay Borris. We will play a game... I will act as a poor girl, a character to find my real self. Ikaw naman, have a goodtime. I will let you pretend as a privilege woman. You can use my car in going to school. You can go to discos, malls and have new sets of friends. Do you understand?"

Umiling sa tindi ng pagkalito si Corazon.⁴³

("I want to run away from everything... I want to live... and love the little things that God gave to me... do you understand me, Corazon?")

"I'm sorry for wearing this gown of yours, Ma'am... It won't happen again. I was just so eager to experience even if only for once what I would look like if... I were a socialite..."

But Alma's thoughts were on herself.

"I want to be somebody who is not me. I just want to forget that I am Alma Velez... even if only for a short while. I want to play a role... like on stage... like an actor portraying a particular role."

[...]

⁴³ pp. 35-6.

"I don't mind your fantasizing, Corazon. Actually, you can become me just don't copy my vices. And me, I will pretend to be you... for a change..."

Corazon's eyes widened [...]

"Switch...? Something like that?"

"Well... something like a switch, something not quite like it. Role playing only, like how you pretended to be me on the telephone, when you entertained Borris. We will play a game... I will act as a poor girl, a character to find my real self. As for you, have a goodtime [*sic*]. I will let you pretend as a privilege woman [*sic*]. You can use my car in going to school. You can go to discos, malls and have new sets of friends. Do you understand?"

Corazon shook her head in utter confusion.)

As a whole, Taglish was useful and appropriate for the romance novels because the language did not alienate audiences, which would have been the likely case if only English or only Tagalog were used as the medium of expression. Taglish made the romance novels easy and fun to read.

The accessibility of the Filipino romance novels was a vital factor behind the popularity of the form. Because the books were easy to read and to understand, readers were readily able to relate to the stories and to live vicariously through the characters. The romance novels indulged the fantasies of the readers and offered them a means of wish fulfilment.⁴⁴ Thus it was crucial that the stories presented heroines who were admirable but not enviable, with whom the readers could identify; heroes who possessed all the ideal qualities as a partner, whom readers could only dream about; and conclusions that were uplifting and hopeful, which kept alive the romantic desires, fantasies, and wishes of the readers. The heroine is usually a modern 'liberated' type from the middle or lower class. She is beautiful, sexy, and young. According to Barrios, the heroine need not be intelligent but she should not

⁴⁴ The experience of Filipino romance novel readers displays striking similarities with as well as differences from that of other readers of the same kinds of books in their own languages. For the American experience in particular, see Janice A. Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, 2nd edn (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

be dumb either. The heroine could be clever even if she had not studied much, able to debate with anyone, and skilful in exchanging arguments. Barrios emphasizes that these qualities are important to readers who, in real life, get dumbstruck when they are shouted at or cannot answer back at their ill-tempered employers for fear of being fired.⁴⁵ As for the hero, aside from being rich, he is of course tall, dark, and handsome. At the onset of the story, he must seem uninterested in or unavailable for the heroine whether due to his involvement with another woman or, more often, to his aloof nature. The aloofness of the hero serves as an important device, for it adds some mystery to the character and facilitates the conflict in the story. If the hero were head over heels in love with the heroine from the very beginning of the story, notes Barrios, then the narrative would be over even before it began.⁴⁶ Ultimately, the hero must win the love not only of the heroine but of the readers as well.⁴⁷ The happy endings of the Filipino romance novels reveal that the realistic details employed in the stories served superficial purposes. If the novels were indeed realistic, then their endings would often be sad.⁴⁸ Real life for most Filipinos, especially from the social classes to which the romance novel readers belong, involved conditions that were grim, problems that were not easily solved, and dreams that were left unfulfilled. That is why happy endings were crucial in the romance novels: it was what the readers wanted because it was what they needed.

⁴⁵ 'Hindi na mahalaga kung matalino siya.... Huwag mo rin naman siyang gagawing masyadong tanga.... Kung gusto mong maging safe, gawin siyang marunong kahit hindi masyadong nakapag-aral, kayang makipag-debate kahit kanino at mahusay makapagpalitan ng mga argumento.... Mahalaga ito sa mga mambabasang sa totoong buhay ay natatanga kapag nasisigawan o kaya'y hindi nakakasagot sa mga amo na masungit dahil natatakot masesante'. 'Chapter Eight', p. 291.

⁴⁶ 'Chapter Eight', p. 291.

⁴⁷ Barrios, 'Chapter Eight', p. 291.

⁴⁸ Barrios, 'Chapter Eight', p. 294.

Displaying what appears as brilliant market savvy, Books for Pleasure read their audience accurately from the very start and took to heart their desires. The firm created the winning recipe for the Filipino romance novel, which included all the necessary ingredients that appealed to the readers. Books for Pleasure observed the following editorial guidelines for their Valentine Romances series:

1. The story should be proper – nothing subversive or incendiary although controversial topics may be the subject of fiction;
2. There should be no explicit sex, but the novel should not be too Victorian;
3. A happy ending is a must;
4. The story should be set in a familiar place for easy identification by the readers; and
5. Colloquial language should be used for easy reading.
6. The story must be of medium length, about 100-110 pages [typescript].⁴⁹

Other publishers adhered more or less to these requirements. As for Precious Pages, Matias claims that ‘There are really no set rules’. But he specifies that he does not ‘like sensitive matters, like rape, incest and other taboo subjects’, that ‘Lovemaking should be described in a romantic way’, and that ‘Taglish is fine as long as the storytelling is fluid and colloquial’.⁵⁰ It is notable that the titles of Precious Pages generally presented bolder and more racy sex scenes than the Books for Pleasure titles,

⁴⁹ Benjamin Ocampo quoted in Remedios Zoleta-Miciano, ‘Contemporary Tagalog Novels (1975-1985): Semiotic Perspectives’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of the Philippines, 1992), p. 258.

⁵⁰ It is interesting to note how the editorial guidelines of Mills & Boon differ from Filipino romance novel publishers’ in that Mills & Boon placed a special emphasis on the development of characters, themes, and plots according to the specific nature of each of their series (Modern, Tender, Historical, and Medical Romances). Yet the Filipino romance novels and the Mills & Boon books seem no different at heart. The guidelines for Mills & Boon Tender Romance, for instance, read: ‘Tender Romance (Harlequin Romance) celebrates women’s experiences – in life, and especially in love – set against a variety of international settings. Although primarily written in the third person, from the heroine’s viewpoint, we do consider stories written from different perspectives. A strong, charismatic hero is essential; but, most importantly, readers must be able to identify intimately with a believable, engaging heroine. Stories should capture the rush of excitement as the couple strive [*sic*] to overcome the emotional barriers keeping them apart. These conflicts should be contemporary and relevant to today’s women. Whilst sexual description won’t be explicit, there should be an edge of sensual tension. Above all, we’re looking for novels with a fresh voice: sparkling, feel-good stories bursting with lively interaction and a guaranteed buzz of romantic excitement’. ‘MILLS & BOON TENDER ROMANCE (Harlequin Romance)’, *MillsandBoon.co.uk* <http://www.millsandboon.co.uk/cgi-bin/millsandboon.storefront/44c5e0b5001b6f402740c0_a801a506b5/Catalog/1083> [accessed 21 April 2006].

which in contrast appear conservative or perhaps 'Victorian' indeed in their treatment of sex. Despite having no fixed editorial guidelines, Precious Pages exercised a 'strict quality control' over their material. In fact, according to Reynante, some of the manuscripts they rejected ('because the stories are so-so') were taken on instead by other publishers. The success of Books for Pleasure and Precious Pages may be attributed in part to the editorial standards they held. The stories published by the companies displayed more skilful handling of characters, settings, plots, language, and other literary elements. Among the numerous Filipino romance novels that were produced, the titles of Books for Pleasure and Precious Pages stand out as classier products not only in content but also in packaging (cover design, text lay-out, binding quality). Behind the success of Books for Pleasure and Precious Pages were also keen business strategies that involved looking after authors and seeking new writing talents; maintaining the interest of the audience; and paying careful attention to the marketing and distribution of their books.

In the Filipino romance novels, both professional and aspiring writers found not only a literary outlet that guaranteed a wide readership but also a source of good income. Authors generally received royalties of 6 per cent of the cover price for each copy.⁵¹ For the more popular authors, this rate could generate as much as thirty-six thousand pesos (P36,000) per book priced at thirty pesos (P30) each with a print run of 20,000 copies.⁵² Such an income was no small fortune in the late twentieth century. It was comparable to the monthly salary of a corporate executive. It was certainly more than, say, what a university instructor (lecturer) could earn in a month. Barrios, who is an academic, poet, and playwright, admits that one of the reasons that she writes romance novels is for the money: When the rent is nearly due, my typing on the

⁵¹ Barrios, 'Pagsusuri sa Pagkabighani sa mga Nobela ng Pag-Ibig', p. 285.

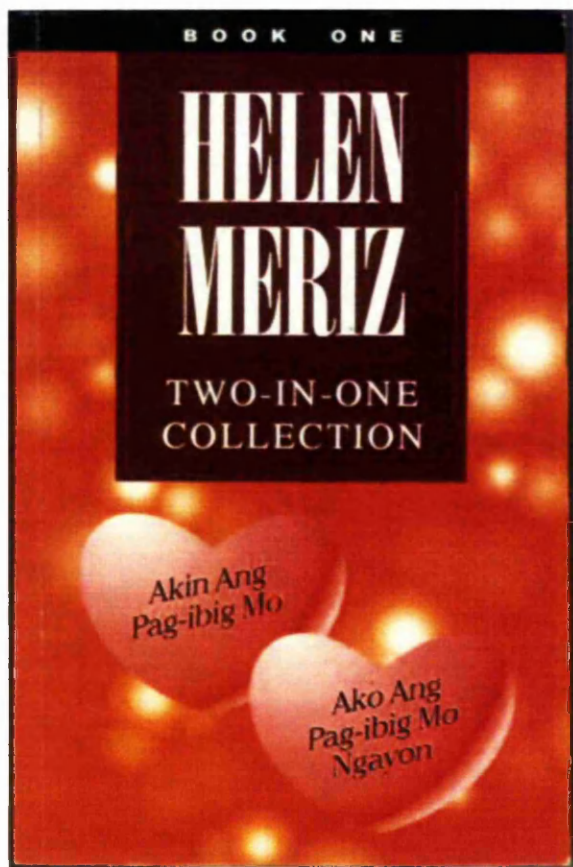
⁵² Barrios, 'Pagsusuri sa Pagkabighani sa mga Nobela ng Pag-Ibig', p. 285.

computer becomes faster ('Kapag nalalapit na ang pagbabayad ng upa ng bahay, napapabilis ang pagtipak ko sa kompyuter').⁵³ For professional authors, writing romance novels seems to have been an easy means of making a living. Nerissa Cabral, for instance, who made her reputation from writing for comic books, could finish a romance-novel manuscript in ten days.⁵⁴ Interestingly, Cabral claims that she herself is not fond of reading romance novels, for she finds them 'corny'.⁵⁵ Cabral along with Maria Elena Cruz, Helen Meriz, Gilda Olvidado, and Marissa Pascual were among the top writers of Books for Pleasure. The firm published many novels by these authors and reprinted the particularly successful titles, which expanded the readership not to mention the incomes of the writers. Books for Pleasure further promoted the writers, and capitalised on their popularity, by pitching them as brand names and re-issuing their works in special editions (FIGURE 37). The marketing of authors as brands, which first emerged in comic book publishing during the 1950s, was a strategy that Filipino romance novel publishers carried on in their business. Like some of the leading comic book writers, a few romance novel authors who had become trademarks in their own right ventured out on their own. Cabral, for instance, had to her name the Nerissa Cabral Series under the imprint of Emmica Publishing and the Nerissa Cabral's Springtime series under La Primera Publishing, both running in the mid-1990s. Olvidado published her own Gilda Olvidado Series, also around the same period, while remaining in the roster of Books for Pleasure authors. Precious Pages, which was a more aggressive publisher if not the most in the romance novel business, protected its interests by offering exclusive contracts to its

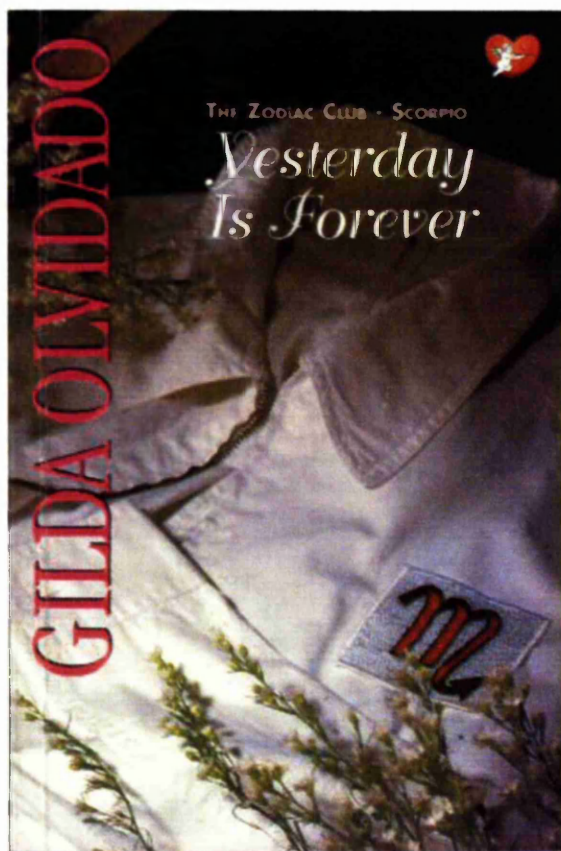
⁵³ 'Chapter Eight', p. 295. Barrios is Associate Professor with the Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature of the University of the Philippines (Diliman).

⁵⁴ Susan A. de Guzman, 'Queen of Hearts', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 21 February 1993, p. 18.

⁵⁵ De Guzman, p. 18.



(a)



(b)

FIGURE 37. Front covers of two titles of Books for Pleasure displaying author branding: (a) *Helen Meriz Two-In-One Collection*, Book One, first published in 1996 and reprinted in 2000; (b) *Yesterday is Forever* by Gilda Olvidado, published in 2001.

(Images reduced.)

successful or promising writers. It begs mentioning that while all romance novel writers appeared as female, whether using their real names or pseudonyms (such as Lady Godiva, for instance), they were not all women, as Barrios notes.⁵⁶ Such an appearance was evidently a strategy used by the publishers to better cater to the audience and to maintain a sense of female bonding between author and reader, as if one woman were telling her own love story to another. This may have served to ensure the involvement of the readers in the stories and to facilitate the wish-fulfilment function of the romance novels.

In order to meet the seemingly insatiable demand of the market, romance novel publishers generally were open to all sources of material. But, notably, it was the readers they turned to for stories. Nearly all publishers issued calls for manuscripts in their books, encouraging readers to become writers themselves and promising publication for approved manuscripts and even potential careers in romance novel writing. Serving as a salient example in this respect is the experience of Martha Cecilia, who was an 'office girl' and then a full-time housewife before she became a bestselling romance novel author. As she declares, 'I am not a literary writer, never claimed to be one. But my love of reading and my being an incurable romantic seemed to roll into a career'. Martha Cecilia was first published by Precious Pages and became one of the firm's writers under exclusive contract.⁵⁷ Early in the twenty-first century, Precious Pages would take a step further in soliciting manuscripts from its audience by launching a regular romance novel writing contest with cash prizes ranging from six to fifteen thousand pesos (P6000-15,000) aside from publication for the winning entries. Tapping the audience for material was a clever strategy for the publishers, for it provided them with a supply of new stories from sources who were

⁵⁶ 'Pagsusuri sa Pagkabighani sa mga Nobela ng Pag-Ibig', p. 286.

⁵⁷ Martha Cecilia, 'Mula sa Author', in *Midnight Phantom*.

well aware of the workings of an entertaining and successful romance novel. The strategy also heightened the engagement of the readers, particularly those who happened to have some writing aspirations, for it offered a possible outlet for their talent and the opportunity along with the prestige and thrill of being published. To some degree, the strategy served also to expand the audience of the romance novels. Publishers could count on the friends and family members of the readers who achieved publication to read if not buy their titles. The symbiotic relationship between publishers and readers of romance novels thus involved not only finished products (the books) but also raw materials (stories and manuscripts). In more ways than one then, the publishers fed the romance novel market and fed on it as well.

The publishers sought to maintain the interest of their audience by exploring variations of the romance novel genre while strictly adhering to the basic content formula. This was most evident in the development of different series that were generally designed according to certain themes. Most publishers had at least two series running under their imprints. Books for Pleasure displayed a rather conservative approach in this aspect, keeping mainly to its Valentine Romances line, its Valentine Super Romances series, which were thicker volumes of around 300 pages, and its special reprint editions. Precious Pages, on the other hand, pursued this strategy with much more energy and creativity. By 2000, the firm had produced around thirty series covering what seems to have been any and every possible theme that was allowed by or could be fitted into the romance novel formula—from family dramas (The Gonzalez-Carredano Saga), travel (Places & Souvenirs), marriage (My Lovely Bride; Wedding Vows), text messaging (Txt Lyf), teen-age romance (18 Roses), to specific types of heroes (The Bachelors; Bad Boys). The bestselling titles of Precious Pages were re-issued under the Precious Hearts Classics and All-Time Favorite

Collections series. The firm would continue to develop more series in the succeeding years.

As far as marketing and distribution are concerned, more than the other Filipino romance novel publishers, it was also Precious Pages that displayed extraordinary effort and ingenuity. The firm placed their books for distribution not only through the traditional retail outlets but also in other new areas, the feminine products section of supermarkets for example. Aside from being distributed nationwide, the Precious Pages titles were exported to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, the Middle East, and the United States, where the firm secured outlets in Filipino shops and establishments. The partners Matias and Reynante travelled frequently to these countries to look after their distribution channels. Capitalising on the Filipino diaspora was one aspect of the aggressive enterprising nature of Precious Pages. Among the Filipino communities overseas, there was a lively market for all sorts of Filipino products, including romance novels. The books appealed especially to female migrant workers, the ranks of whom were significantly increasing. When Filipino workers began going overseas for employment in 1975, only 12 per cent of their number was female. By 1995, of the 721,200 Filipinos working overseas, 52 per cent (375,024) were women.⁵⁸ It seems likely that the romance novels offered the overseas readers more than romantic, escapist, and cheap entertainment; the stories must have also helped alleviate somewhat the longing for home that inevitably comes with living in a foreign land. The biggest overseas market of Precious Pages was Hong Kong, where there are more than 100,000 Filipinas working as domestic helpers.

⁵⁸ Jeanne Frances I. Illo, *Country Briefing Paper: Women in the Philippines* (n.p.: Asian Development Bank, 1997), p. 28. The figures are based on the official account of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, the national agency tasked with monitoring and processing the migration of Filipino overseas contractual workers (OCWs). It may well be assumed that the actual number of OCWs is higher, considering that it is not uncommon for many Filipinos to work overseas without legitimate employment or immigration documents.

Beyond the retail distribution networks of the publishers, there existed other channels through which the Filipino romance novels circulated. The books found their way into book rental shops and stalls located in markets, malls, and university areas throughout the Philippines. One such establishment, Edgardo S. Perea's book rental shop *Julerie Enterprises* at the *Guadalupe Market* in *Makati*, lent out romance novels for a fee of four pesos (P4.00) per book for a three-day period.⁵⁹ Ninety-five percent of Perea's stock of local fiction (some 1200-1400 volumes) was made up of romance novels; 99 per cent of his clients were female.⁶⁰ The romance novels also circulated through public and private libraries in the country. The *University of the Philippines Main Library* (in *Diliman*), for instance, has a sizeable collection of well-worn copies, which are interestingly borrowed mostly by members of the library staff as revealed by the library cards of the books. The romance novels sometimes even ended up in faraway, unexpected places. In *London*, for instance, the *Filipino groceries* at *Earl's Court* sold used copies, when they were available, at a price of one pound (£1.00) for three titles. Other than circulating through these commercial and institutional channels, the romance novels also commonly passed around among readers, who lent or exchanged copies from their personal collections with relatives and friends who were just as enamoured with the genre. The readership of the Filipino romance novels is estimated at the range of one to five readers per book.⁶¹ Any successful title then, which achieved a print run of at least 20,000 copies, was possibly read by as many as 100,000 people.

⁵⁹ Edilberto N. Alegre, 'Who Says the Masa Only Reads Komiks?', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 21 February 1993, p. 18.

⁶⁰ Alegre, p. 18.

⁶¹ Barrios, 'Pagsusuri sa Pagkabighani sa mga Nobela ng Pag-Ibig', p. 278.

In the early twenty-first century, the competition in the Filipino romance novel publishing business grew more intense. Precious Pages would secure its leading position in the trade by increasing its output and launching promotional campaigns that put to shame the efforts of other publishers. While some publishers would market their series by packaging them in sets of four books selling at only eighty-eight pesos (P88) with free mobile phone pouches even thrown in (as in the case of Nem's Publication) or in '5 in 1' packages, where five books priced individually at thirty-five pesos (P35) were sold as a set at one hundred pesos (P100) only (Lorimar Publishing), Precious Pages would promote its titles through grand annual raffles offering mobile phones, home furniture and appliance showcases, and even house-and-lots as prizes, all tax-free. The firm would also expand its business by venturing into the book retail business, opening a chain of Precious Pages bookshops with branches in various low-end malls in and outside Metro Manila, and by entering the vibrant publishing sector of children's books with the imprint Lampara (Lamp) Books. As for Books for Pleasure, by 2003, the company felt that the romance novel market had become saturated and that its Valentine Romances series, which had produced over a thousand titles, had 'outlived its purpose'. According to Ocampo, with the stiff competition in the business, 'other so-called publishers started playing "dirty" by producing smut disguised as romance novels'. Books for Pleasure would not deign to such a tactic because it wanted to keep its integrity intact, says Ocampo. The firm discontinued its series and retired from the Filipino romance novel business in late 2003.⁶²

⁶² E-mail message, 17 February 2006.

During the period from 1985 to 2000, the publishing of Filipino romance novels was a massive enterprise involving numerous titles issued every month (around sixty at one point), print runs of 5000 to 20,000 copies per title, and brief periods in which the titles sold out (some in as short as two weeks). Such figures appear all the more staggering in contrast to the numbers involved in the production of 'serious' literary works in English and Tagalog (Filipino). From 1985 to 2000, there were only around forty-seven novels in English published and around sixty in Tagalog (of which sixteen were translations of foreign novels; thirteen, new editions of Philippine 'classics'; four, Tagalog translations of Filipino novels in other languages; and the rest, new titles). The average print run of literary titles stood at 500 to 1000 copies, which took no less than two years to sell out.⁶³

The popularity and success of Filipino romance novels may be attributed to a combination of elements: the realities of existence in the Philippines at the time, which were not always pleasant or heartening; the predilection of the mass market for cheap escapist entertainment as conditioned by their economic and social circumstances and by the tradition of popular Philippine literature; and the ability of authors and publishers to keep finely attuned to their readers and to respond precisely to their demands. It was this complex mix that made Filipino romance novels appealing to hundreds of thousands of regular readers, which secured its remarkable position as the literary bestsellers during the period of 1985 to 2000.

⁶³ Bolasco, 'Publishing and Writers', p. 7.

CONCLUSION

Insist on a happy ending ('Ipagpilitan mo ang ending na masaya'), Joi Barrios tells aspiring authors in an article on how to write romance novels. Sad novels, she points out, do not sell ('Hindi nabebenta ang mga nobelang malulungkot').¹ While Barrios is referring to a specific genre that was the most popular in the Philippine literary market during a particular period in the twentieth century, she could well be dealing with the other kinds of literary writings that outsold their contemporaries during other periods of the century. Her advice could have well applied to other authors who sought to write in the bestselling form of their day.

In the twentieth century, the literary bestsellers of the Philippines were the metrical romances (during the 1900s to the 1920s), Tagalog novels (1920s to 1940s), comic books (1950s to 1980s), and romance novels (1985 to 2000). All these literary types are marked by a formulaic quality: their characters are often stereotypical, their plots usually involve incredible turns of events, their temper is generally sentimental and sensationalistic, and more often than not their endings are happy. All essentially offer escapist entertainment. Furthermore, all provide quick and easy reading. Their texts are usually brief and can be read completely in one sitting. On the one hand, it was these characteristics in their contents that made the metrical romances, Tagalog

¹ 'Chapter Eight (O Kung Paano Magsulat ng Romance Novel)', in *Ang Aking Prince Charming at Iba Pang Noveleta ng Pag-Ibig* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2000), pp. 290-5 (p. 294).

novels, comic books, and romance novels the bestsellers of their time. On the other, it was their forms: each of the literary types suited its cultural moment.

The metrical romance flourished when the Spanish heritage was still deeply embedded in Filipino society. The popularity that the form held during the Spanish colonial rule of more than three centuries carried over into the early decades of the new century and the new era under the American colonial administration. The metrical romance was a medium that provided readers of the time with familiar and favourite stories, religious and moral instruction, and in some measure an affirmation of their national identity. It was a form that they were unable and unwilling yet to abandon. Then, the novel in Tagalog thrived when the genre of prose fiction was no longer new for Filipino writers and readers but no less exciting as when it had first appeared in 1899. Through its regular appearance in periodicals and in book form, the novel became a part of life in the towns and cities of the Philippines. It gave Filipinos something else to read and talk about, something that was more engaging perhaps and more entertaining certainly than the news, and that was more realistic and relevant than the literary forms of the past. The freedom of expression and enterprise that existed under the American rule allowed Filipino writers and publishers to develop the Tagalog novel as a literary form and, more significantly, as a commercial product. Next, the comic book prospered almost immediately after its first appearance in 1946, when the Philippines was in the process not only of recovering from the devastation brought about by the Japanese Occupation and World War II but also of building a new independent nation after around four centuries of existing as a colony of other nations. The comic book provided amusement and relief during serious and difficult periods in Philippine modern history. As heavily influenced by American models and American popular culture,

the comic book appealed to the Americanized sensibilities of Filipinos. Yet the form bore aspects that were distinctly Filipino too, and this kept it in touch with the native mentality and personality. With its visual quality, the comic book aligned itself with cinema and television, which were also popular forms of entertainment at the time. Finally, the romance novel succeeded during a period of national reformation, modernization, and urbanization. The advancement of technology, for one, led to many changes in society. A significant development in this respect was the increasing part television claimed in the lives of more and more Filipinos. Television was becoming an indispensable source of information and entertainment. For people who still chose to read for amusement, the romance novel provided the pleasure they wanted. The form was, in a sense, the counterpart in print of the popular television soap operas ('telenovelas') as well as radio dramas and love-story movies (of the Philippine film industry and of Hollywood). The romance novel, too, factored in the growing diaspora of Filipino workers that marked the period. Wives of overseas contract workers (OCWs) and female OCWs themselves, who had more disposable income than most workers who remained in the Philippines, found diversion, enjoyment, and some solace in the romance novel.

Accounting for the popularity of Philippine metrical romances in the nineteenth century, Bienvenido L. Lumbera remarks that 'the analytic temper was slow in developing among the audience'. The metrical romances, as all other poetry of the period, were 'meant to be chanted or sung, not read in the privacy of one's study', thus nineteenth-century audiences apparently did not look into the finer points of character, setting, and plot development. They 'seemed to have accepted extravagant fancy as the mark of the superior poet'.² Considering that the metrical romances

² Bienvenido L. Lumbera, *Tagalog Poetry 1570-1898: Tradition and Influences in its Development* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1986), p. 119.

remained popular during the early decades of the twentieth century and that the Tagalog novels, comic books, and romance novels that succeeded it in popularity display its heavy influence, one might well think that the analytic temper scarcely developed at all among Filipinos. But perhaps the truth of the matter is that Filipinos, the masses in particular, were not inclined to be analytical in the first place, at least when it came to reading literary books. This disinclination has to do with life in the Philippines and with the nature of Filipinos.

The Philippines has many problems: it is a country ensnared in political conflict, graft and corruption, injustice and inequality, environmental destruction and deterioration, and mass poverty. Ultimately, it is the problem of poverty that has most and long afflicted the nation. As Jose Y. Dalisay Jr succinctly observes, 'our poor are very poor, and our poor are very many'.³ When the Americans took control of the Philippines from Spaniards at the turn of the century, around 80 per cent of the Filipino population was estimated to be living below the poverty line. In the 1970s, this figure was said to be at around 70 per cent. In 2000, according to the official estimates released by the National Statistical Coordination Board, 4.3 million families or 26.5 million Filipinos or more than one-third (34 per cent) of the population fell below the poverty line. The annual per capita poverty threshold, or the amount required to satisfy food and non-food basic needs at the national level, was pegged at P11,605 (around £120 at that time).⁴ The numbers provide a picture of the poverty problem in the Philippines, but they do not reveal the grim details: people who cannot afford to eat even one nutritious meal in a day, families living in plywood shanties in city slums, children scavenging through mountains of rubbish for food or anything

³ 'Literature and Contemporary Philippine Politics', paper delivered at the 4th International Seminar on Southeast Asian Literature, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 29-30 November 2005, p. 4.

⁴ '4.3 Million Filipino Families are Living Below the Poverty Line', *National Statistical Coordination Board* <http://www.nscb.gov.ph/factsheet/pdf03/fs3_07.asp> [accessed 25 July 2006].

useful that could be sold, farmers who till lands that are not their own and who hardly benefit from the harvests they reap. The dire conditions in the Philippines have led many Filipinos to seek employment outside the country to better their financial situation and quality of life. Today, one out of every ten Filipinos (or around eight million) is living and working overseas.

The difficulties of life in the Philippines certainly must have had something to do not only with what kinds of books the Filipino masses preferred to read but also with how they chose to read these books. They tended not to be analytical in their reading perhaps because they could not be bothered to do so, having more than enough to think (and worry) about in their daily existence, or because they could not afford to be so, whether due to the lack of time and opportunity or to the limitations of their education. But the Filipino nature itself must have had something to do as well with what and how the masses read. Filipinos are emotional, sociable, and optimistic. They are easily amused ('mababaw ang kaligayahan'). They are a happy people.⁵ This nature is reflected in what and how the Filipino masses chose to read. Their books of choice were those with stories featuring characters that they could readily recognise and identify with, plotlines that were exciting if not astonishing and that allowed for the display of a wide range of emotions, and endings that were uplifting and inspiring. The books were easy and fun to read, and did not take too much of one's time away from family and friends. During the twentieth century, the metrical romances, Tagalog novels, comic books, and romance novels gave the Filipino masses

⁵ There is evidently some empirical proof of this happy nature of the Filipinos. As Alan C. Robles reports in *Time* magazine: 'The World Values Survey published by the University of Michigan [in 2004] ranked 82 countries and territories according to feelings of 'subjective well-being'—which combined happiness and 'life-satisfaction' scores—and the Philippines had one of the highest ratings in Asia, above far richer locations such as Taiwan, Japan and South Korea. A few years back, a Hong Kong ad agency found the Philippines to be the happiest place among a group that included Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and mainland China'. For Filipinos, Robles concludes, 'happiness is not a goal: it's a tool for survival'. 'Happiness Viewpoint: It Doesn't Take Much', *Time*, Asian edn, 28 February 2005, repr. in *Time* <<http://www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/article/0,13673,501050228-1029896,00.html>> [accessed 25 July 2006].

precisely what they wanted, which was perhaps what they needed: cheap, formulaic, escapist entertainment.

The content and form of the metrical romances, Tagalog novels, comic books, and romance novels were crucial to the massive popularity and extraordinary commercial success that they attained. But just as vital was their publishing and distribution. Behind the bestsellers were enterprising and clever publishers who were receptive to the tastes, desires, and interests of mass audiences. The publishers were able to recognise or to create the literary forms that appealed to the masses, and they ensured that the forms stayed true to the formulaic and escapist elements. They produced these forms in cheap books and kept a steady flow of titles coming. They made these accessible not only in bookshops but also in many other outlets within easy reach: vendors around the cities and towns, newsstands, corner shops (*sari-sari* stores), markets, and groceries. In effect, the mass market was stimulated and satisfied by the publishers. Theirs is a key role in why and how the metrical romances, Tagalog novels, comic books, and romance novels became the bestsellers of the Philippines during the twentieth century.

It is this role of publishers that this study has looked closely into in its examination of twentieth-century literary publishing in the Philippines and its identification of the bestselling literary forms of the period. Tagalog bestsellers comprise only a small part of the great big story of the book in the Philippines. There are many other subjects, events, circumstances, and characters in Philippine book history that remain to be discovered, identified, and examined. May this study be useful for those who would take on the task (and pleasure) of telling and reading into these other parts of the story of the Philippine book. May this study serve as a happy beginning for the History of the Book in the Philippines.

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